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The Letters of St. Paul [Lecture Notes]

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The Letters of St. Paul (3 units), spring 2017

Instructor: Dr. Scott G. Sinclair

Course Description: A study of the major themes of Paul's thought through the letters he wrote as responses to problems in the early Christian church.

Student Learning Outcomes for this course: A knowledge of 1) the literal contents of Paul's Letters, 2) the cultural and historical situations to which the letters respond, and 3) the enduring theological perspectives that appear in these responses.

Textbook: A modern translation of the Bible and the lecture notes below.

Diversity: We will study how Paul could insist that all ethnic groups can be one in Christ without losing their distinctive identities. We will look at how the Pastoral Epistles attempt to accommodate Christianity to the larger Roman world and what this accommodation suggests about contemporary attempts (e.g., at Dominican) to bridge the gap between the Church and secular culture. In addition, we will consider in detail Paul's comments on women and homosexuality and how we might respond to such comments today.

Lecture and Discussion Notes and Daily Assignments

An Introduction to Paul's World and Life and Lasting Significance

- I. More than anyone else, Paul was responsible for making Christianity an international religion.
 - A. Jesus did not initiate contacts with Gentiles, and all of his original followers seem to have been Jewish.
 - B. After his death, Christian missionaries began to approach Gentiles, and Paul was apparently the most successful in making converts.
 - C. Paul was the person who insisted that Gentiles did not have to become Jews in order to belong to the Church.
 - D. Therefore, Paul is primarily responsible for the international Church as we know it.
- II. In his letters Paul also laid the foundations for Christian thought.
 - A. His letters are probably the oldest surviving Christian documents.
 - B. They helped mold the young congregations to which they were written.
 - C. Subsequently, the letters were collected and in the second century became part of the New Testament.
 - D. As such, they have been a major influence on the Christian world ever since.
- III. Consequently, the question of what Paul's letters mean and whether they are true and relevant finally becomes the question of what Christianity means and whether it is true and relevant.
- IV. In this class I hope to give you two things:
 - A. An informed, personal answer to the questions of what the letters mean and why they are true and relevant
 - B. The tools to disagree with me and come up with your own informed answer to these questions.
- V. Survey: What are your present beliefs about Christianity and about Paul, and why did you decide to take this class?
- VI. A sketch of Paul's world.
 - A. Paul lived in the Eastern Mediterranean during the first century C.E. He was probably born a little after the beginning of the Common Era and died in the early 60's.
 - B. The world Paul knew was divided into Jews and Gentiles.
 - C. Judaism in Paul's time.
 1. There were Jewish communities throughout the Eastern Mediterranean (as well as elsewhere). Jews were the majority in Israel, their ancient homeland. Elsewhere they were a minority.
 2. Politically they were subject to Roman rule (whether direct or indirect).
 3. Culturally, they had to struggle to maintain their distinctive identity in the midst of Greco-Roman civilization. Because they had long been under first Greek and then Roman rule, Jews had already

adopted some aspects of Greco-Roman culture.

4. Despite the fact that there were different sects, all Jews would have held that God

- a. Through a series of historical acts had chosen the Jewish people for a special relationship with himself.
- b. Taught that he was the only God and demanded justice.
- c. Gave the Jews the Mosaic law (found in the first five books of the Bible). Note, especially,
 - 1). This law included both ethics and taboo. Among other things, the law required dietary restrictions and male circumcision.
 - 2). Keeping the law made Jews distinct and helped preserve national identity
 - 3). Keeping the law did not earn "salvation."
 - 4). Nevertheless, to be in right relationship with God, a Jew had to accept the validity of the law and repent of serious violations (E. P. Sanders), and Jews believed that following the law would lead to blessings from God.

D. Gentiles

1. The Romans governed the entire Mediterranean area but often permitted some local autonomy.
2. The dominant language, especially in the East, was Greek, and this is the language of Paul's letters.
3. To a large degree, there was a single culture which was an amalgam of traditions, particularly from Greece, Rome, and Egypt.
4. There were many religious cults, and most people were polytheists. However, some educated people (e.g., Stoics) were basically monotheists, but were willing to conform by worshiping the gods.

VII. The sources for Paul's life and their value.

A. There are two major sources.

1. Paul's own letters. A couple of introductory remarks about the letters:
 - a. Paul did not write down his letters but dictated them to a scribe (e.g., Rom. 16:22, Gal. 6:11).
 - b. The letters were not mailed, since there was no public post office.
 - c. Instead, Paul had to get someone to deliver them.

2. Luke's Acts of the Apostles.

B. On the whole these sources are good, and, consequently, we know more about Paul than about any other early Christian.

C. Still there are problems.

1. It is sometimes hard to place information gleaned from the letters into an overall chronology of Paul's life. We do not know when and where some of the letters (e.g., Galatians) were written.

2. The material in Acts is not always historically reliable.
 - a. Acts was written at least a generation after Paul's death.
 - b. We do not know what sources of information were then available. Luke probably did not use Paul's letters, since he never mentions them, whereas he quotes from other letters.
 - c. We also do not know how far Luke would go in using his imagination or literary conventions to fill in gaps. Luke has a flair for the dramatic and sometimes includes what were stock scenes (e.g., the miraculous escape from prison) in contemporary literature.
 - d. Luke simplifies and schematizes and downplays the negative.
 - e. Some details in Acts contradict what Paul records.
 - f. Luke idealizes Paul. For example, in Acts Paul is a great preacher, whereas in his Corinthians letters, Paul freely admits that his preaching is not the best.
 - g. Paul's sermons in Acts may be by Luke himself. Ancient historians often produced speeches for characters in their books.

VII. One plausible sketch of Paul's life.

A. Paul had a bi-cultural youth which helped prepare him to be a bridge between Judaism and Gentile Christianity. His double heritage is reflected in his double name of Saul Paul, since Saul was the first king of Israel and Paul was a common last name in Roman culture.

1. He had an impeccable Jewish background.
 - a. He was "a Hebrew born of Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5). Perhaps this means that in addition to being Jewish, he grew up in a home where Hebrew or Aramaic was spoken.
 - b. He apparently received his higher education at Jerusalem where he studied under Gamaliel I, a leading scholar of Jewish law (Acts 22:3).
 - c. He joined the Pharisees (Phil. 3:5), a group which spelled out the details of keeping the Mosaic Law.
2. Yet, he also had a strong Gentile background.
 - a. He came from Tarsus an important political, cultural, and commercial center in the Greco-Roman world (Acts 22:3).
 - b. According to Acts, he was a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37-39, 22:28) as well as a citizen of Tarsus (21:39).
 - c. Paul could write Greek well and, apparently, had some Greek education (through the synagogue?), especially in rhetoric.

B. At some point he learned the trade of tent making/leather working (Acts 18:3) which he subsequently used to support his missionary work (cf., e.g., 1 Thes. 2:9).

C. Throughout his life Paul also had some embarrassing medical problem (2 Cor. 12:7), but it did not prevent him from engaging in enormous

missionary labors.

D. In his early adulthood, Paul persecuted the church, but we have few details. Probably, Paul

1. Feared that Christianity's casualness toward the Jewish law and insistence on loving one's enemies was undercutting Jewish resistance to Paganism (cf. N.T. Wright).
2. Resented Christianity "stealing" potential converts to Judaism and sympathizers by abolishing legal requirements (Crossan).
3. Found the claim that a crucified person was God's Messiah offensive (cf. Gal. 3:13).
4. Felt that Christianity's proclamation that Jesus was "Lord" compromised monotheism.

E. At Damascus Paul "saw" Jesus and became a Christian.

1. We cannot reconstruct the experience in detail.
 - a. Paul himself does not describe it.
 - b. Luke's three accounts are not entirely consistent and may not be based on information from Paul.
2. Nevertheless, the following seems at least likely
 - a. Paul saw a heavenly being clothed with light (1 Cor. 9:1, 2 Cor. 4:4-6, Acts 9:3-6 and para.).
 - b. He then realized this being was Jesus.
 - c. This Jesus loved and forgave Paul.
 - d. Jesus commissioned him to be a Christian missionary to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:16, Acts 26:17).
3. In thinking about this experience, we should be as open to Paul's claim that Christ actually appeared to him as to the possibility that he had a merely "subjective" vision.

D. Events from his conversion until the eve of the apostolic council.

1. Paul soon left Damascus and went to "Arabia" (the ancient Nabatean kingdom which corresponds roughly to modern Jordan [Gal. 1:17]) and returned to Damascus.
2. There his preaching apparently aroused opposition, and he fled (Acts 9:23-25, 2 Cor. 11:32-33).
3. He went to Jerusalem and spent two weeks with Peter and James (Gal. 1:18-19, Acts 9:26-30).
4. Perhaps because of persecution, he then went home to Tarsus, and for the next few years he apparently preached in the vicinity (Gal. 1:21, Acts 9:30). Maybe he founded churches in Galatia.
5. Barnabas brought Paul to Antioch to help the early Gentile church there (Acts 11:25-26).
6. Paul and Barnabas, assisted by others, went on a missionary journey, first to Cyprus, which was Barnabas's home, and then to Paul's home of Asia Minor (Acts chs. 13-14).

E. The Apostolic Council.

1. When Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch, a controversy arose over whether Gentile Christians had to become Jews (i.e., adopt the

- Jewish law, including male circumcision, Acts 15:1-2).
2. To settle the issue, Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to seek support for their position that Gentile Christians did not have to become Jews (Acts 15:2-4, Gal. 2:1-2).
 3. After some controversy, it was decided
 - a. Circumcision and adherence to the ritual laws of Judaism were not necessary for Gentile Christians.
 - b. Paul and his associates would concentrate on converting Gentiles, whereas Peter and his associates would concentrate on Jews.
 - c. Paul would send financial help to the Jerusalem church.
 4. It is less clear whether Paul agreed to the "Apostolic Decree" (Acts 15:23-29), since Paul claims that he did not accept any other conditions (Gal. 2:3-10).
 5. Subsequently, there was a confrontation at Antioch between Paul and other church leaders over whether Jews and Gentiles should eat together (Gal. 2:11ff.).

F. Later missionary work.

1. Paul and Barnabas quarreled, and Paul with his staff went off on a separate journey (Acts 15:36-40).
2. He traveled overland through Asia Minor preaching (Acts 15:41-16:8).
3. Then he decided to cross over into Greece. Evidently, his missionary goals were expanding (Acts 16:9-10).
4. In Greece he founded congregations to which he wrote many of his letters, namely in the cities of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth.
5. Shortly after he was forced to flee from Thessalonica, he wrote to the church there the letter which we call 1 Thessalonians.
6. He spent more than a year and a half preaching at Corinth (Acts 18:11).
7. Around 52 C.E. Paul returned to Antioch, via Ephesus (Acts 18:18-22).
8. Thereafter Paul again went overland through Asia Minor (Acts 18:23).
9. He spent a long time in Ephesus (Acts 19:1) where he wrote 1 Corinthians (1 Cor. 16:8).
9. Sometime afterward, he wrote 2 Corinthians.
10. At the time, Paul was struggling to collect money for the church in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-4, 2 Cor. 8-9).
11. He went to Greece (Acts 20:1-3). While at Corinth, he wrote Romans (cf. Rom. 16:1).
12. He returned to Asia Minor (Acts 20:6-17).
13. Despite the great danger involved, Paul elected to take the collection to Jerusalem himself. He was now planning for a mission to Rome and Spain (Rom. 15:23-24). Note that Spain was the end of

the known world.

G. The conclusion of Paul's life (Acts 21-28).

1. In Jerusalem he was arrested.
2. He was taken to Caesarea where he spent a long period in prison.
3. He was then taken to Rome for trial and spent another prolonged time in custody. Perhaps he wrote Philippians then.
4. We have little evidence concerning what happened next. My guess is that Paul was tried and executed sometime in the early 60's C.E.

VIII. (time permitting) A tour of Paul's world.

- A. Tracing on a map Paul's movements.
- B. Pictures of some of the places where Paul lived.
- C. Illustrations of Paul and his life in Christian art.

Assignment: Read the Acts of the Apostles and Philemon.

Philemon and the Problem of Pastoral Scriptures

(a reading of Philemon)

Discussion: If you were God, what kind of scriptures would you write, and how would you write them?

I. At least many people if they were God would probably produce scriptures with the following characteristics:

- A. Direct inspiration in God's own divine name. God would dictate the text and make it clear that he was the author.
- B. Universal address. The text would be for everyone throughout history.
- C. Detailed regulation. The text would clearly spell out what people should believe and how they should act.

II. Many people regard the Bible or some other sacred text (e.g., the Qur'an) as having these characteristics.

III. Of course, the New Testament book of Philemon does not fit this model.

- A. The author identifies himself not as "God" but as "Paul" (plus Timothy).
- B. The intended recipients are not everyone but Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, and the church that meets in their house.
- C. The message only immediately concerns them. Note, especially,
 1. The letter appeals to an individual, Philemon, to treat another individual, Onesimus, in a certain way.
 2. The larger cultural setting for this message--legal slavery--does not exist in our context.

D. What the letter asks for is vague. Note that verse 21 expresses confidence that Philemon will do even more than Paul has requested.

IV. The clash between the scriptures some people might like and the scripture actually before us in Philemon invites us to examine one set of presuppositions and their logical consequences and compare them with Paul's presuppositions and their consequences.

A. One set of presuppositions

1. God reveals himself primarily in the scriptures, and, especially, in their regulations.
2. The problem which readers of scripture have is how to apply these regulations to specific situations.
- B. The logical consequences of these presuppositions
 1. Legalism. The regulation and evaluation of people's lives by an external standard.
 2. A single culture--namely, the culture that follows the detailed regulations in the scriptures. Note that legalism encourages a definite, limited spiritual attainment and produces guilt for "sinners" and security for the "good."
- C. Paul's presuppositions
 1. God reveals himself primarily in a person (Jesus) who continues to be available in the Spirit.
 2. This person gives only a few very general regulations (e.g., to love).
 3. We come to know what we should do by looking at specific situations (e.g., a master who may want to punish a slave for misbehavior) and asking how we can further love in them.
- D. The logical consequences of Paul's presuppositions
 1. The rejection of legalism. We are free to evaluate each situation on its own terms and can demand of people whatever they are capable of giving.
 2. We can serve God faithfully in many different cultural contexts. Paul as a missionary lived comfortably both in Jewish and Gentile environments (1 Cor. 9:19-22).
- VI. To study Paul we must take his presuppositions seriously, and, consequently, in this course we will do a couple of things.
 - A. We will look at his letters as specific responses to specific situations. Note that we can only reconstruct these situations approximately and must do some guesswork.
 - B. Then we will ask what are the general principles which Paul applies.
 - C. We will next look at how Paul's students adapted his legacy to later developments.
 - D. Finally, we will struggle with the question of whether Paul's thought has a unifying center and, if so, what it is and whether Paul's thought is faithful to the teaching of Jesus.
- VII. The apparent situation to which the letter to Philemon responds
 - A. Paul converted Philemon to Christianity, and Philemon is his friend (vs. 19).
 - B. Philemon is wealthy, and the local Christian congregation meets in his home (vs. 2).
 - C. Philemon's slave Onesimus has been serving Paul in prison, and Paul has converted him to Christianity.
 - D. Paul now must send Onesimus back to Philemon.
 - E. Paul is concerned that Philemon will be hard on Onesimus, perhaps

because in the past Onesimus caused some financial loss to his master (vs. 18). In the Greco-Roman world slaves who got in trouble with their master often appealed to a third person with the hope that the latter would get the master to be lenient. It may even be that Onesimus went to Paul without Philemon's permission (vs. 15).

VIII. Paul's response is to write a letter to Philemon which Onesimus is to deliver.

A. The letter pleads for Philemon to receive Onesimus as he would receive Paul (vs. 17).

B. Paul offers to pay for the financial loss which Onesimus caused (vss. 18-19).

C. Paul asks Philemon to do even more than the letter specifically states (vs. 21).

IX. Paul has shaped the letter to accomplish the specific goal of protecting Onesimus and not offending Philemon and, consequently, the letter is both tactful and manipulative (vs. 22!). Note that the letter is also addressed to the church and accords with first century rhetoric.

X. Nevertheless, within the letter we can see general theological principles which Paul applies.

A. Paul derives at least much of his authority from his own willingness to suffer for Christ (vs. 9).

B. He offers to take the penalty of someone else's sin on himself (vss. 18-19). Note the implied theology of the atonement.

C. He emphasizes that a Christian is necessarily a "beloved brother" (vs. 16).

D. He wants people's goodness to be done willingly (vs. 14) and wants them to be able to make up their own minds about what specifically needs to be done (vs. 21).

E. Nevertheless, such freely chosen goodness is also "obedience" (vs. 21).

XI. In history, this epistle has been interpreted in pro- and anti-slavery ways and illustrates that Paul's letters lend themselves to different cultural settings. Does Paul believe that a slave and a master can be beloved brothers, as a society in which slavery exists might think, or is Paul hinting that Philemon should free Onesimus, as liberal scholars today often assume?

XII. Nevertheless, I would like to believe that the letter was always a force for promoting love and mercy.

Discussion

XIII. In his letters Paul basically follows the customary epistolary form, but he also christianizes it.

A. The customary form for letters in the Greco-Roman world (see, e.g., Acts 15:22-29):

1. Name of sender
2. Name of intended recipient
3. "Greeting"
4. (often) A brief prayer or thanksgiving
5. The letter body (i.e., the real message)
6. (often) Greetings to and from people

7. "Farewell"

B. As we can see from Philemon, Paul christianized this format.

1. He added Christian material to the identification of the senders and recipients (e.g., "Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus").
2. In place of "greeting" he used "grace to you and peace" and added other Christian material (Philem. 3).
3. He made the prayer Christian.
4. He made the greetings Christian ("Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus greets you.")
5. In place of "farewell" he used a Christian blessing (Philem. 25).

XIV. (time permitting) Workshop: Comparing Paul's Letter to Philemon with a letter dealing with a comparable situation from approximately the same period. How is Paul's letter similar to and different from the following, and which letter do you prefer?

"C. Pliny to Sabinianus. Your freedman, whom you lately mentioned as having displeased you, has been with me; he threw himself at my feet and clung there with as much submission as he could have done at yours. He earnestly requested me with many tears, and even with the eloquence of silent sorrow, to intercede for him; in short, he convinced me by his whole behavior, that he sincerely repents of his fault. And I am persuaded he is thoroughly reformed, because he seems entirely sensible of his delinquency. I know you are angry with him, and I know too, it is not without reason; but clemency can never exert itself with more applause, than when there is the justest cause for resentment. You once had an affection for this man, and, I hope, will have again: in the meanwhile, let me only prevail with you to pardon him. If he should incur your displeasure hereafter, you will have so much the stronger plea in excuse for your anger, as you show yourself more exorable to him now. Allow something to his youth, to his tears, and to your own natural mildness of temper: do not make him uneasy any longer, and I will add too, do not make yourself so; for a man of your benevolence of heart cannot be angry without feeling great uneasiness. I am afraid, were I to join my entreaties with his, I should seem rather to compel, than request you to forgive him. Yet I will not scruple to do it; and so much the more fully and freely as I have very sharply and severely reprov'd him, positively threatening never to interpose again in his behalf. But though it was proper to say this to him, in order to make him more fearful of offending, I do not say it to you. I may, perhaps, again have occasion to entreat you upon his account, and again obtain your forgiveness; supposing, I mean, his error should be such as may become me to intercede for, and you to pardon. Farewell." (Pliny the Younger Epist. 9.21)

XIV. Discussion: How do you feel about Paul's contextual approach? Would you prefer Paul simply telling Philemon that having slaves is sinful and ordering Philemon to free Onesimus? Would such an approach have been realistic at the time? What are the major differences between these two letters? What led to the differences?

Assignment: Reread Philemon. Read 1 & 2 Thessalonians and Acts 17.

An Illustration of the Importance of Looking at Paul's Letters Contextually: 1 & 2 Thessalonians

Key quotes: 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3a: "You yourselves know accurately that the day of the Lord is coming like a thief in the night. When they say, "Peace and safety,"

then sudden destruction will come on them."

2 Thessalonians 2:2-3: "We ask you, brothers, concerning that coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him that you not be quickly shaken or upset in your mind whether through a spirit or through a word or through a letter, as though from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Do not let anyone deceive you in any way. Because the revolt must come first and the man of lawlessness be revealed."

- I. (review) Paul begins with the pastoral situation and then applies to it the principles that are relevant and will promote his goals.
- II. Basically, Paul's students did the same. Note that in ancient times much of religious education involved imitating the teacher.
- III. If we keep this theological methodology in mind, we can make sense of many anomalies. To make sense of such anomalies we must
 - A. Reconstruct the situation to which a given epistle responds.
 - B. See how the epistle responds and why.
 - C. See how Paul selectively invokes his theology in framing the response.
 - D. Only when we have looked at the various responses in all the letters can we go on to ask whether Paul had a "systematic" theology and, if so, what it was.
- IV. One such anomaly is the difference between the descriptions of the end of the world in 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians.
 - A. In 1 Thessalonians Paul tells his readers that the end could come at any time (5:2-7), and he apparently assumes that it will occur during his own life (4:15). We even get the impression that the end probably will take place during a period of outward calm (5:3).
 - B. By contrast, in 2 Thessalonians we read that the end will not occur soon (2:2), and that before it does an Antichrist ("man of lawlessness") must arise (2:3-4).
- V. In other respects, however, the two letters to the Thessalonians are strikingly similar.
 - A. The letters have structural parallels. Note the double thanksgiving in each (1 Thes. 1:2, 2:13; 2 Thes. 1:3, 2:13).
 - B. There are also common themes that are not prominent elsewhere in Paul.
 - 1. God will take vengeance on the enemies of the church (1 Thes. 2:14-16, 2 Thes. 1:6-10).
 - 2. Christians must not live in idleness (1 Thes. 4:11-12, 5:14; 2 Thes. 3:6-13).
 - C. We even have many instances of common wording (e.g., 1 Thes. 1:1 versus 2 Thes. 1:1; 1 Thes. 2:9 versus 2 Thes. 3:8).
- VI. There are only two good explanations for such similarities.
 - A. Paul composed both letters about the same time.
 - B. 2 Thessalonians is an imitation of 1 Thessalonians which develops its themes. Note that 2 Thessalonians seems to refer to 1 Thessalonians and

must be later (2 Thes. 2:2).

1. Perhaps Paul asked a secretary to draft a letter like the one he had already written, and then Paul signed the result (3:17). This is my view. The letter lists both Timothy and Silvanus as authors along with Paul.

2. Or after Paul's death a disciple wrote 2 Thessalonians to show how Paul would have responded to a crisis that in many ways was similar to the one Paul addressed in 1 Thessalonians. In this case the emphatic statement in 2 Thessalonians that Paul wrote the letter (3:17) could be taken as a claim that the letter fairly represents what Paul would have said. Or 2 Thessalonians could conceivably be a forgery.

VII. The imitation theory may more readily account for the detailed similarities in wording and structure and for the many differences both in style and content. Note, for example, that the sentences in 2 Thessalonians are longer and more repetitive.

VIII. From the letter and Acts 17 we can reconstruct the situation that prompted 1 Thessalonians. 1 Thessalonians was written around 50 C.E. and is Paul's earliest surviving letter and probably the oldest surviving Christian document.

- A. After Paul arrived in Macedonia, he suffered persecution at Philippi and then came to Thessalonica, the capital of Macedonia (Northern Greece) and an important port and commercial center. There he founded a church.

- B. Because of further persecution he had to leave Thessalonica prematurely.

- C. He sent Timothy back to comfort the church and find out how the members were doing.

- D. Timothy reported that the church was surviving but there were certain problems, probably including

1. The persecutors were defaming Paul.

2. Some of the Thessalonians had died (because of the persecution?), and the congregation did not know whether these dead Christians would share in the resurrection. Perhaps Paul had not dealt with the issue of the dead because he thought the persecution was a sign that the end of the world was imminent (Marxsen).

3. Some members of the congregation were not working.

IX. Paul apparently thought the first two issues were more serious and devoted the bulk of the letter to defending his conduct and reassuring the Thessalonians that the dead would rise. He dealt only briefly with the issue of working.

X. Since he wanted to comfort the Thessalonians, he emphasized that the end of the present world (and, hence, final salvation) might come at any time and certainly would be fairly soon.

XI. By contrast, when 2 Thessalonians was written, the problem of not working had become much more serious. Apparently, 1 Thessalonians (cf. 2 Thes 2:2) and continuing persecution had encouraged the belief that the world would end soon, and people quit work.

- XII. Consequently, "Paul" insisted that the Thessalonians must work, and whoever refused should not be given any support.
- XIII. Apparently, to encourage people to return to work, the letter insisted that the end would not be soon because first the Antichrist had to appear.
- XIV. We can now see why 1 Thessalonians claims the end of the world will be soon, whereas 2 Thessalonians claims the opposite.
- XV. It may well be that both letters draw on different elements of a common expectation. Perhaps Paul taught that the world would end relatively soon, but first the Antichrist must appear. This scenario actually occurs elsewhere in the New Testament (esp., Revelation).
- XVI. Excursus on the Antichrist.
- A. The Greek ruler Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) had a personality which in many ways resembles Hitler's and like some other rulers at the time was worshiped as a god.
 - B. Around 167 B.C.E. Antiochus defiled the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, outlawed the observances of orthodox Judaism (e.g., circumcision), and attempted to kill Jews who refused to forsake their faith.
 - C. The biblical of Daniel was a direct response to the persecution.
 - D. To steel the faithful to face martyrdom, the book of Daniel portrays Antiochus IV as the final monster in history who would immediately precede the coming of God's glorious rule (which would include the resurrection of the dead).
 - E. Daniel then set the expectation that just before the end of this world and the triumph of God a supremely powerful and evil ruler would appear who would persecute the faithful.
 - F. This expectation was taken over by the early church and appears in a number of New Testament documents (2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 John, Revelation).
 - G. Biblical prophecies are, at least in part, warnings of what will happen if we make certain choices.
 - H. The biblical doctrine of the coming of the Antichrist remains a timely warning that
 - 1. Perhaps the worst possible corporate sin is to deify a ruler, giving the ruler vast power and no moral accountability.
 - 2. That sin is as likely as any other to destroy the world as we know it.
 - 3. Nevertheless, even if the world is destroyed, there is eternal life, and God will still reward the righteous and punish the wicked.
- Discussion: What are the strengths and weaknesses of living as if the world or our individual lives were about to end soon? Would you live better or worse if you thought that this week was the last of your life? Given the fact that we can never know whether we have a short or long time left, how should we live? (time permitting) Pictures of Thessalonica and artistic representations of the Antichrist
- Assignment: Reread 1 & 2 Thessalonians. Read 1 Corinthians and Acts 18. Study 1 Corinthians 1-4.

Introduction to the Lectures on 1 Corinthians

- I. Often the situations which Paul addresses have many similarities to situations we encounter today.
- II. As a result, Paul's specific advice sometimes continues to be very helpful.
- III. To illustrate how Paul's advice continues to give us insight, we will go through 1 Corinthians section by section. 1 Corinthians takes up a series of specific church problems one by one. Accordingly, after a general introduction to the letter we will consider each of these specific issues and how Paul responds to them. At each point we will discuss how we feel about Paul's response in its original context and whether it continues to be helpful today.

The Basic Situation which Prompted 1 Corinthians and Paul's Basic Response

Pictures of Corinth

- I. A little about the city of Corinth.
 - A. Corinth was on a narrow strip of land connecting two large portions of southern Greece.
 - B. Consequently, it was a major port.
 - C. In Paul's day the city had a great ancient heritage but nevertheless was relatively young and prosperous.
 - 1. In previous centuries Corinth had been one of the most important cities in Greece.
 - 2. However, in 146 B.C.E. the Romans conquered and destroyed the city.
 - 3. In 44 B.C.E. the Roman Emperor Julius Caesar had the city rebuilt, and it became the capital of its province.
 - 4. In Paul's day Corinth was booming.
 - 5. Corinth hosted a famous set of athletic competitions, and this fact helps explain the sports metaphors in Paul's letter.

Key Quotes: 1 Corinthians 1:11: "It has been reported to me about you, my brothers, by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you. This is what I am saying, that each of you says, 'I am on Paul's side' or, 'I am on Apollos's side,' or I am on Cephas's [Peter's] side, or . . . "

1 Corinthians 5:9: "I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons . . . "

1 Corinthians 7:1: "Now concerning the things that you wrote: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. But because of cases of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and each woman have her own husband."

II. 1 Corinthians and Acts 18 give us a fair amount of information about the events that led to the letter.

III. Specifically, several things happened:

A. There was a succession of different church leaders, and, as a result, factions arose.

1. Around the year 50 C.E., Paul, arrived in Corinth where he met Priscilla and Aquilla, and the three of them founded the congregation. After about a year and a half, all three left (Acts 18:1-18, e.g., 1 Cor. 3:10, 16:19). The Corinthian congregation seems to have been predominantly Gentile with a sizable Jewish minority.
2. Then another prominent missionary, Apollos, visited Corinth, made a strong impression, and left (Acts 18:24-28, e.g., 1 Cor. 16:12).
3. Given this succession of leaders, factions were probably inevitable.

a. Successions of leaders normally produce cliques, especially if one of the leaders is the congregation's founder and if the various leaders have powerful and distinctive personalities and perspectives.

b. Such was certainly the case with Paul, Priscilla, Aquila, and Apollos. Note that Apollos was an impressive preacher (Acts 18:24-28).

c. Especially in the first century, missionaries tended to make a congregation in their own image because there was no New Testament and teaching was incarnational. The convert came to know Christianity through observing the pastor.

d. The sociology of the Corinthian church favored cliques.

1). From what Paul tells us, it is clear that the congregation consisted of a small number of wealthy and powerful people and a much larger group of others (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:26).

2). It seems likely that each of the wealthy and powerful persons had supporters who were economically dependent on him or her and would side with him or her in any disagreement.

3). Consequently, any disagreement within the elite would necessarily produce factions.

4). The situation was even more prone to division if the Christian community in Corinth (and the vicinity) consisted of independent house churches. Different house churches would follow different leaders, probably the leader endorsed by the owner of the house.

5). In the ancient Mediterranean world people were constantly competing for honor. Note that in the ancient world there was less competition for money than today because the total amount of resources was

fixed.

4. By the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, identifiable factions seem to have arisen (1 Cor. 1:12).

B. There was a continuing, unhappy series of communications between Paul and the Corinthians.

1. After leaving the Corinthians Paul received disturbing news (from "Chloe's people") about the congregation's moral life.

2. He then wrote a strong letter in response. The letter directed that the Corinthians were not to associate with immoral persons.

Apparently, the Corinthians misinterpreted this letter by assuming that the immoral persons were outsiders rather than members of the church (1 Cor. 5:9-13).

3. Paul (also?) received word from "Chloe's people" that factions had arisen (1 Cor. 1:11-12).

4. The Corinthians sent Paul a letter containing a series of written objections and questions (note 1 Cor. 7:1), probably delivered by Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (16:17).

5. Paul then sent 1 Corinthians in response to the deteriorating situation and also sent Timothy (4:17; with the letter?).

C. The Corinthians interpreted Paul's original message in a one-sided way and developed an enthusiastic theology and lifestyle.

1. The "now concerning" clauses in 1 Corinthians provide a particularly useful indicator of this theology.

a. These clauses (1 Cor. 7:1, 7:25, 8:1, 12:1, 16:1, 16:12; cf. 11:2, 34) seem to be replies to specific sections in the letter that the church sent Paul (7:1).

b. Especially in 7:1 and 8:1 Paul seems to summarize the Corinthians' viewpoint before replying to it.

2. Another important indicator is the slogan "all things are lawful" which Paul repeatedly quotes (1 Cor. 6:12, 10:23) and corrects.

Apparently, this was a statement Paul himself had made which the Corinthians tossed back at him.

3. On the basis of these and other indications, we can hypothesize that the Corinthians believed that through the Spirit they had received God's final blessings (1 Cor. 4:8).

4. Hence, they did whatever they liked without worrying about conventional Christian practice, including normal guidelines on sex and worship.

5. The Corinthians' theology and lifestyle arose when the congregation placed a one-sided emphasis on Paul's own preaching that Christ has freed us from law, sin, and death.

IV. Paul's basic reply is to affirm that Christians are on the way to freedom but have not fully arrived.

A. Yes, we have the Spirit which in principle gives us access to the wisdom and power of God.

B. However, our resurrection and final judgment are still to come.

- C. In this life we face weaknesses and temptations.
 - V. Because we are only on the way, we must in practice
 - A. Behave sensibly in the light of our own weaknesses
 - B. Respect the weaknesses of others
 - C. Take seriously the examples of mature Christians, particularly
 - 1. Our leaders
 - 2. The traditions of other congregations
 - 3. The clear teaching of Jesus.
 - D. Recognize that in this life we are primarily called to loving self-sacrifice.
 - E. Be aware that Christ will judge us and we should behave accordingly.
- Note that in the teaching of Jesus judgment is primarily exposure.

Discussion: What do you think of the basic theology of the Corinthians? What do you think of Paul's basic response to it? To what extent do you think that you personally have been set free? To what extent do you still need rules and sanctions?

Assignment: Study 1 Corinthians 1-4.

Wisdom and Leadership; 1 Corinthians 1-4

- I. 1 Corinthians makes it clear that the congregation felt that it was wise (e.g., 3:18) and could question Paul's leadership (cf. 9:1-4). Specifically,
 - A. The Corinthians felt free to regard Apollos as superior to Paul (1:12).
 - B. They questioned Paul's theology and pastoral guidance (note their letter to Paul).
- II. These issues arose, at least in part, because of the history sketched above.
- III. It was awkward for Paul to reply to the allegations that the Corinthians knew as much as Paul and that Apollos was a better leader.
 - A. Paul agreed that the Spirit gives access to Christ's (God's) own mind and so in theory the Corinthians could be as wise as Paul.
 - B. He apparently respected Apollos (cf. 16:12).
- IV. Accordingly, Paul had two difficult tasks:
 - A. To re-establish his own authority over the congregation and end division without undermining Apollos.
 - B. To affirm that Christianity gives spiritual wisdom, but that the Corinthians were not wise.

Key quote: 1 Corinthians 3:5-6: "What is Apollos, or what is Paul? Servants through whom you gained faith, and to each as the Lord granted. I planted; Apollos watered; but God gave the growth."

- V. One synthesis of Paul's argument on leadership:
 - A. Ultimately, Christ is the only church leader (3:11, 22-23).
 - B. The sole function of other church leaders is to promote our relationship to Christ, and, since Christ gives growth, even this role is limited (3:5-8).
 - C. This role is also temporary, since leaders are to help us gain maturity,

and once we achieve it, their task is done.

D. Accordingly, we should think of our leaders not as masters, but servants (4:1).

E. Hence, to focus on a leader--especially as an object of boasting--is foolish.

F. Nevertheless, we should respect our leaders, since all we have comes through them (4:7).

1. They are the source of the tradition about Christ.

2. They are our parents and guides (4:15).

3. Moreover, one sign that we are becoming mature is that we do not engage in unnecessary criticism and self-exaltation, but leave judgment to God (4:5).

G. The Corinthians should look to Paul.

1. He is their founder and the principal source of the tradition and past pastoral guidance (3:10).

2. He is an ideal leader, because he always acted as their servant and pointed them to Christ (2:1-5) and willingly suffers for their sake (4:11-13).

H. However, looking to Paul does not mean any disrespect for Apollos, because Paul and Apollos are fellow servants working for the same master and are nothing in themselves (3:5-9).

I. Moreover, we should beware of judging leaders because God called them and is their judge, and a leader who is too concerned about what we think is not focused on Christ (4:3-5). We should especially beware of emphasizing a leader's worldly gifts because these focus us on the leader rather than on Jesus (2:1-5).

Key quote: 1 Corinthians 2:8-10a: "None of the rulers of this age understood. For if they had understood, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory. But, just as it is written, 'No eye has seen or ear heard or any human heart conceived how much God has prepared for those who love him,' God has revealed to us through the Spirit."

VI. One synthesis of Paul's argument on wisdom.

A. Christians possess wisdom because through the Spirit we have access to the mind of Christ, especially his plans for our eternal glory (2:6-16). Note that the central question of life is where are we ultimately going.

B. Christian wisdom is contrary to worldly wisdom.

1. Worldly wisdom comes from our own cleverness and focuses on things in this world and leads to pride and division.

2. Christian wisdom is based on God's power and comes to us through accepting the preaching of the cross which in this world is foolishness (1:18-25). Christian wisdom focuses on the life to come and leads to humility and unity.

3. Accordingly, if you are self-seeking and divisive, then your wisdom is worldly, not Christian, and, hence, the Corinthians need

milk, not solid food (3:1-3) and are in no position to criticize Paul.
VII. Excursus: Paul's understanding of the relationship of knowledge, faith, and theology.

- A. Faith is the trust that allows us to turn our lives over to God and includes certain ideas (e.g., that Christ died for us). However, these initially seem to be foolishness.
- B. Knowledge can be a basis for pride and can block turning our lives over to God (8:1). Hence, the world cannot know God through wisdom (1:21).
- C. Consequently, God saves us through the seeming foolishness of the cross which when preached mediates the powerful presence of God himself (1:18-25) and destroys pride.
- D. Once we have surrendered to God, we come to have a knowledge of spiritual things--like the mystery of God's plan for saving the world (2:6-16). However, only others who have reached a similar maturity really understand when they hear our "knowledge."

VIII. Now that Paul has punctured the pride of the Corinthians and re-established his claim to be their primary leader, he can go on to give directions concerning other urgent issues (Barclay).

Discussion: Is the situation of the Corinthians in respect to leadership and wisdom similar to situations today? Are Paul's reflections helpful to us? How do you feel about your teachers and pastors? How should you feel?

Assignment: Reread 1 Corinthians 1-4. Study 1 Corinthians 5-7.

Sexual Behavior; 1 Corinthians 5-7

Discussion: What should the church (or society in general) teach about sex, marriage, and divorce? Why?

Key quote: 1 Corinthians 6:13b-17: "The body is not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. God raised the Lord and will raise us up through his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Certainly not! Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her, for it [scripture] says, 'The two will become one flesh.' But he who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with him."

I. 1 Corinthians suggests that the sexual behavior of the congregation has become a little bizarre.

- A. On the one hand, the church seems to advocate sexual abstinence, not simply as an ideal, but almost as a requirement (7:1). Consequently, single persons are not getting married, and married people, especially women (7:10-11), are refusing to have sex with their spouses and are seeking divorces (ch. 7).
- B. On the other hand, the church accepts some extra-marital relations, including a man living with his father's wife (5:1), and perhaps people getting involved with prostitutes (6:9-20).

II. Historical background

- A. In the first century, Christian attitudes toward sex were turning negative, and the Greco-Roman world held that sexual abstinence facilitates contact with the divine.
- B. Classical Corinth, which was destroyed in 146 B.C.E., had been a center of sexual immorality, and Roman Corinth's moral life remained sordid.
- C. Some of the people in the congregation had led immoral lives before converting to Christianity (6:9-11), and most were relatively poor and uneducated (1:26).
- D. In Corinth Paul probably preached
 - 1. Christ has freed us from the law, from the so-called "gods" of this age, and from arbitrary social convention. Women must have found this message congenial, since they suffered from great social discrimination.
 - 2. The world as we know it is about to end, and in the next world there will be no marriage (cf. Mark 12:25).
- E. This message in connection with Paul's own celibacy could easily have inspired sexual abstinence, and asceticism did begin to appear.
- F. At the same time, libertine tendencies appeared (1 Cor. 5:9-13). These are understandable, since some of the ideas that led to asceticism (e.g., freedom through Christ) could be used to justify immorality, and since unrealistic denials of sexual drives get us into trouble.

III. Dealing with this situation was awkward for Paul because he had to affirm his original positions while denying the conclusions drawn from them.

IV. Paul's general theological response is that sexual misconduct is incompatible with life in Christ and is not helpful even if theoretically "all things are lawful" (6:12).

- A. Our present sexual activity has spiritual consequences both in this life and the coming one. Human beings are a psychosomatic unity, and God will raise up our integral selves (6:13-14).
- B. As Christians, we have given our entire selves over to Christ, and our bodies are to be temples of the Holy Spirit (6:15-20).
- C. Casual sex degrades our lives and destroys our relationship to Christ, because it makes us one flesh in an unspiritual relationship and gives that relationship power over us (6:12, 15-16).

V. Paul's basic pastoral response is to safeguard the community by removing excessive temptation.

- A. Paul expels the man who is living with his father's wife (ch. 5). This stern response is necessary because the offender and the congregation are arrogant. Hence, the man's example might inspire others. Paul is not crushing someone who knows he has made a mistake and has suffered community criticism. He also hopes that his action will ultimately lead to the offender's salvation (5:5).
- B. The unmarried should strive for celibacy only if it is manageable. Celibacy is a gift, not an achievement, and those who burn with passion should marry (7:7-9). Note the assumption that sex should only take place

within the context of marriage.

C. The married should honor the sexual obligations they agreed to and not lead their spouses or themselves into temptation (7:3-7).

VI. Paul's response to divorce.

A. The Corinthians, and, apparently, especially the women, were getting divorces, and in some cases Christians were divorcing Pagans (7:10-13).

B. There were probably two reasons.

1. A low opinion of sex.

2. A view that a truly holy and liberating relationship could only be had with a Christian. Note that this view was attractive to women because they enjoyed a higher status in the church than in Pagan society.

C. The problem of divorce was especially serious.

1. Jesus attacked divorce and remarriage.

2. Christians divorcing Pagans might dangerously antagonize society.

D. Paul's basic response is that Christians should not divorce and remarry by their own choice, but are free to do so if the Pagan spouse chooses to leave. Paul emphasizes that

1. Jesus rejected divorce and remarriage (7:10-11).

2. We should honor the sexual obligations we made (7:3-4).

3. Hence, if we are having problems with our spouse, we should only separate and await an opportunity for reconciliation (7:11).

4. However, if a Pagan partner chooses to leave, then we are free to remarry. Not everyone has the gift of celibacy, and God calls us to be at peace (7:15).

VII. Excursus: The New Testament teaching on divorce and its application today.

A. Jesus's basic teaching was that a man who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery.

1. This core occurs in the various passages in which Jesus discusses divorce (Mat. 5:32, 19:9, Mark 10:11, Luke 16:18).

2. These passages then expand the saying in various ways (e.g., that a woman who divorces her husband and marries another man commits adultery; Mark 10:12).

3. Many scholars (including me) believe that these expansions are from the early church. Note that a woman divorcing her husband would have been difficult in Jewish Palestine but was possible in Corinth and at Rome.

B. This core teaching is both paradoxical and extreme. By definition, one cannot commit adultery against one's first wife after divorcing her (Malina).

C. Like other such teachings of Jesus it is meant to point in a particular direction and provoke the hearers to come up with their own specific applications. Jesus's statement is not to be taken literally.

D. Apparently, Jesus wanted to make at least three points:

1. Marriage is not primarily a contract but a psychosomatic unity,

- and, therefore, adultery is primarily a matter of the heart, not a matter of law. Hence, divorce and remarriage can be adultery.
2. Jewish law about divorce and remarriage did not sufficiently honor the rights of women.
 3. With the preaching of Jesus and his followers, people are gaining a new power to love and be faithful.
- E. In the New Testament exceptions are made to Jesus's general teaching.
1. In Matthew's Gospel Jesus states that unchastity is grounds for divorce and remarriage (Mat. 5:32, 19:9, cf. 1:18-19).
 2. Paul makes the departure of an unbeliever grounds and states that not everyone has the gift of celibacy, and "God has called us to peace" (1 Cor. 7:15).
- F. I take these exceptions as illustrative rather than exhaustive.
- G. One suggestion for what the Church should teach about divorce and remarriage today.
1. Since marriage produces a psychosomatic unity, divorce and remarriage always involves some "adultery" from a psychological and spiritual perspective. Naturally, the less time between the divorce and the remarriage, the greater the "adultery" is likely to be.
 2. Hence, divorce should only occur as a last resort, and, ideally, after the divorce, a person should remain single, especially for a time. Of course, before taking the drastic step of seeking divorce, people should avail themselves of every possible spiritual resource, especially an awareness of God's empowering love.
 3. Nevertheless, there are legitimate grounds for divorce and remarriage, and the church must help people discern what these are, being mindful that God has called us to peace and not everyone has the gift of celibacy.
- IX. An evaluation of 1 Corinthians' sexual teaching.
- A. We today should value marriage more highly than 1 Corinthians does.
1. Unlike 1 Corinthians (e.g., 7:29-31) we do not believe that Christ's return is imminent and that, therefore, raising children is relatively unimportant.
 2. 1 Corinthians addresses people who opposed marriage and normal sexual relations and treats marriage more negatively than Paul might have otherwise.
- B. Still, I think Paul's basic teaching is sound. The primary issue with sexuality is not unwanted pregnancies, let alone AIDS (though these are issues), but the nature of the union that sex produces.
- X. Discussion: Does the situation of the Corinthians in respect to sexual conduct have any resemblance to situations today, and are Paul's reflections helpful to us?
- Assignment: Reread 1 Corinthians 5-7. Study 1 Corinthians 8-10.

Eating Meat Sacrificed to Idols; 1 Corinthians 8-10

Key quote: 1 Corinthians 10:23-28: "All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful, but all things do not build up. Let no one seek their own interests but the interests of others. Eat everything sold in the market, questioning nothing on account of conscience. For 'the earth belongs to the Lord and all that fills it [Psalm 24:1].' If one of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eat everything set before you, questioning nothing on account of conscience. But if someone says to you, 'This is meat offered in sacrifice,' do not eat it on account of the person who informed you and [his/her] conscience."

I. Ancient Gentiles normally were polytheists and used portraits of the gods and goddesses, whereas the Jews were strict monotheists and rejected all images.

A. The Greco-Roman world of Paul's day believed in many gods and goddesses who basically were personifications of natural (e.g., lightening), psychological (e.g., sexual desire), and political (e.g., the city of Rome) forces. It was normal to use paintings and, especially, statues to represent these deities.

B. Since the time of Moses (13th c. B.C.E.) Judaism insisted that there was only one God and that no image could be used to represent him. In the Bible this one God is jealous and severely punishes people for worshiping other deities or making images for worship.

II. In ancient Pagan worship there were animal sacrifices, and some of the meat was available for people to eat.

III. A Christian could come into contact with such meat under various circumstances.

A. Apparently, it was sold unlabeled in the marketplace, and a Christian might buy some unknowingly (cf. 1 Cor. 10:25).

B. A Christian might accept a private invitation to a dinner at which sacrificial meat might be served (10:27).

C. A Christian might be part of an association which had some religious activities, including a solemn meal, perhaps at a temple (cf. 8:10).

D. Sacrificial meat might be served to the general public during major civic celebrations.

IV. There was deep disagreement in the early church over whether or not Christians could eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols (e.g., Rev. 2:19-23).

A. Jewish Christians tended to forbid eating such meat.

1. To them anything associated with polytheism or idolatry was abhorrent and liable to lead to divine punishment.

2. As Jews they tended to be involved in far fewer social situations where others would consume such meat.

B. By contrast, Gentile Christians were often permissive, both because they had been used to eating such meat before conversion and because even afterward they continued to be in social situations where such meat was normal. Especially, upper class Gentiles would frequently be in situations where sacrificial meat would be available. Note that meat was expensive.

V. The situation in Corinth that Paul responds to in 1 Corinthians 8-10.

A. When Paul originally came to Corinth, he probably preached that

1. There is only one God, and we must worship him alone.
 2. Christ has set us free from the Mosaic Law, but Jews may continue to follow it if they wish.
 3. Christ has freed us from the destructive powers of this fallen world and given us the sacraments.
- B. The congregation that resulted contained both Jews and Gentiles, and the majority were uneducated.
- C. At some point, certain members, probably led by sophisticated upper class Gentiles, concluded that it was all right to eat sacrificial meat, and they started to do so. This development occurred for several reasons:
1. The Corinthians assumed idols were harmless, since Pagan gods do not in fact exist (8:1-6) and the sacraments protect Christians (cf. 10:1ff.).
 2. They further noted that since "all things are lawful" (10:23), eating sacrificial meat was permissible.
 3. Perhaps they also appealed to the Paul's example of changing one's lifestyle to fit the circumstances one happens to be in (1 Cor. 9:19-23).
- D. The fact that certain members of the congregation were eating meat sacrificed to idols began to cause problems.
1. Conservative Jewish Christians both in Corinth and elsewhere must have been uneasy (cf. 10:32), though Paul does not discuss this.
 2. Less sophisticated members of the congregation began to act against their consciences (1 Cor. 8:7).
 3. There was the danger that people might go on to participate in actual Pagan worship (10:14).
- VI. As in other problems dealt with in 1 Corinthians, it was awkward for Paul to respond because he had to affirm what he had previously taught and yet also had to restrict what the Corinthians were doing on the basis of it.
- VII. A synthesis of Paul's argument.
- A. In principle it is permissible to eat meat sacrificed to idols.
1. There is only one God, and everything belongs to him (1 Cor. 8:6).
 2. When we give thanks, we consecrate everything by acknowledging his lordship over it (1 Cor. 10:30; cf. 1 Tim. 4:3-5).
- B. Nevertheless, we must not eat meat if we are leading others to act against their consciences.
1. As Paul's own example demonstrates, we must use our freedom for love, not self-indulgence (ch. 9).
 2. If we encourage others to act against their consciences, we lead them into sin (8:7). To choose to do what you believe to be wrong is to choose to do wrong.
 3. Hence, we must defer to the weak when they are present and not eat meat sacrificed to idols (10:28-29).
- C. It is always wrong to participate in Pagan worship.
1. Even though there is only one God and so the deity an idol

represents does not actually exist, the Pagans do worship something.

2. What they worship is opposed to God and so is a demon (10:20). Note that Pagan deities were often personifications of superhuman powers (e.g., love, war), and demons in Jewish thought were superhuman powers opposed to God.

3. When we worship something other than God, we are disloyal to him and call into question our worship of him.

4. In the past God severely punished his followers for participating in such worship (10:1-11).

VIII. I believe that there are at least important implications for us in Paul's discussion.

A. We must not pressure people to act against their consciences, because acting against conscience is always sinful.

B. Hence, we must work to enlighten people's consciences.

C. Education and sophistication do not give us the right to treat others cavalierly but instead the obligation to be helpful.

IX. A more difficult question is whether we should agree with Paul in forbidding Christians to participate in "Pagan" worship.

A. Whereas Judaism tended to be exclusive, Paganism was inclusive. In polytheism it is easy for worshipers to incorporate new gods.

B. Today honoring "diversity" is a major ethical value, and one way that we honor diversity in religion is by participating in the devotional practices of different religious groups.

C. Nevertheless, there are limits to acceptable diversity, and we would not feel free to participate in any conceivable religious practice (e.g., human sacrifice).

X. Reflection: It seems to me that Christians can respond to Paul's rejection of Pagan worship in one of three ways today.

A. We can claim that Paul was correct and that today too Christians must show their loyalty to Christ by refusing to participate in non-Christian worship.

B. We can claim that Paul was wrong. His attitudes reflect a narrow first century Jewish Christian view, and today we can find God (maybe even find Jesus) in non-Christian religions.

C. We can claim that Paul was correct in rejecting the Pagan religion of his day, but that today we know religious traditions that are far more helpful.

Discussion: If you are a Christian, which view would you take and why?

Regardless of your religion, do you feel free to engage in devotional practices of other religious groups? Can you imagine situations when you would decline to participate in such practices?

(time permitting) Reflection and Discussion: There are several possible bases for moral decisions 1) traditional regulations, 2) the contemporary views of one's group, society, era, or "experts," 3) one's individual sense of what is right or wrong. Which of these do you think is the most reliable and why? Which does the most to form our "consciences" (i.e., what we finally conclude is right or wrong)? How can we come to a more reliable sense of what is ethical?

Assignment: Reread 1 Corinthians 8-9. Study 1 Corinthians 10-11. Read Exodus 1-24. Attend a Mass (Eucharist) if you have not been to one recently.

The Eucharist in 1 Corinthians 10-11

Discussion: What is Holy Communion (Mass, etc.), and why is it meaningful to so many people?

Key quotes: 1 Corinthians 11:20: "When you come together it is not [truly] to eat the Lord's Supper, for each person goes ahead in eating and one is hungry but another is drunk."

1 Corinthians 11: 23b-26: "The Lord Jesus in the night on which he was arrested took bread and, after giving thanks, broke it and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this for my remembrance.' Similarly, [he took] the cup also after supper and said, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink, for my remembrance.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

I. As Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, Jesus on the night before his execution had a solemn last meal with his disciples. At it, according to the tradition that Paul quotes, Jesus

A. Said that the bread and wine were his body and blood.

B. Asked his disciples to remember him at subsequent meals.

II. The re-enactment of this meal became the central Christian ritual. It now has many different names including, Mass, Eucharist, Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper, Divine Liturgy, Sacrament Meeting.

III. The comments on the Eucharist in 1 Corinthians 10-11 are of extraordinary interest because they are the only ones in Paul's writings and are the earliest in all Christian literature.

IV. Paul frames his remarks to deal with two pastoral problems:

A. The possibility that Christians might worship idols (see above)

B. Division at the Eucharistic celebration.

1. Some people were arriving before others (11:21, 33-34), and there were great inequalities in consumption ("One is hungry, but another is drunk" [11:21]).

2. This division was probably due to the great social and economic disparities within the congregation and the insensitivity of those who were well off.

a. The free and wealthy were able to come early, whereas the poor and the enslaved could not.

b. Apparently, everyone brought and ate their own food, and some ate much better than others. Alternatively, the host fed everyone but did so in accordance with their differing social statuses, as was normal in the Greco-Roman world.

- c. It seems unlikely that masters would normally be sensitive to the feelings of slaves.

V. The Corinthians seem to have had a "magical" view of the sacrament (i.e., that the sacrament was automatically effective against all harm regardless of the disposition of the worshiper).

- A. At least the sophisticated Corinthians had no fear of coming into contact with Pagan religion.

- B. Paul has to emphasize that the sacraments are no protection against divine judgment and that the abuse of the Eucharist has already brought judgment on the congregation (10:1-11, 11:29-31). Note: 10:1-11 refers back to incidents in the Old Testament which Paul sometimes interprets figuratively.

- C. The Corinthians' disregard of community unity at the larger meal suggests they placed extraordinary emphasis on the isolated act of receiving the blessed bread and wine.

VI. It is easy to understand how the Corinthians came to their magical sacramental perspective.

- A. The majority of the congregation had been Pagans and uneducated, and many probably had believed in magic.

- B. The words, "This is my body," taken in isolation would encourage a magical view (cf. later church history).

- C. A magical view fits into the Corinthians' larger perspective that they had already achieved God's final blessings.

VII. In contrast to the magical view, Paul seems to assume a covenantal one. Note that he even uses the word "covenant" in 11:25.

- A. The biblical understanding of covenant, especially as manifested in the basic covenant at Sinai.

- 1. A covenant is a solemn commitment, particularly one that establishes a special relationship between God and a person or community.

- 2. In the Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures the basic covenant is the one that God made with the Israelites at Sinai. This covenant placed conditions on the Israelites, especially,

- a. The worship of no other god

- b. The just treatment of other members of the community, particularly the poor and weak.

- c. The observance of religious rituals according to specific guidelines.

- 3. Depending on their faithfulness to the covenant, God blesses or punishes the Israelites. The punishment is meant to bring the Israelites back to God.

- B. Jewish worship, especially the celebration of the Passover, involved covenant renewal, including

- 1. The recalling of God's mighty acts through which he delivered the Israelites from slavery and brought them into a special relationship with himself

2. The looking forward to future blessings, particularly the consummation
 3. The recommitment to the covenant
 4. A meal that reasserts our fellowship with God and one another.
- C. Paul has already mentioned the Passover in the letter (5:7-8), and the letter was probably written around Passover (cf. 16:8).
- D. In this context the food (e.g., the Passover lamb) is the instrument through which unity is symbolized and reaffirmed.
- E. When we study Paul's treatment of the Eucharist, we see that he understands it to be new covenant worship.
1. Christ by his death, resurrection, and Spirit has made a new covenant that establishes a special relationship between him and his people (11:25).
 2. As in the Sinai covenant, we have three basic conditions
 - a. The exclusive worship of God and Christ. Note Paul's emphasis that we cannot be partakers of both Christ's table and that of demons (10:21).
 - b. The just treatment of the poor and weak. Note Paul's outrage over putting those who have nothing to shame (11:22).
 - c. The proper conduct of liturgy. Note that later in the letter Paul will give additional liturgical directions.
 3. Depending on the community's faithfulness, worship can be a source of blessing or curse. Since the Corinthians were not being faithful, Paul emphasizes the danger of God's judgment (esp., 11:29-31). However, as in the Sinai covenant, God's punishment is intended to promote restoration (11:32).
 4. The Eucharist recalls God's mighty acts through which he called his people into existence, especially Christ's death, and anticipates final salvation (11:26).
 5. Apparently, the Eucharist involves recommitment. The bread is the body of Christ, and so is the congregation. Perhaps Paul is saying that through the Eucharist the faithful become Christ's "body" (i.e., the place where Christ's spirit rules and acts). Elsewhere in the letter Paul calls the congregation "Christ's body" (1 Cor. 12:27).
 6. The Eucharist is a meal that reasserts our fellowship with Christ and one another (10:16-18).
 7. Within this context, the bread and wine are the instruments through which the unity is symbolized and affirmed, since the bread and wine are actually shared.

VIII. In response to the abuses of the sacrament, Paul took at least a first step (Barclay) toward eliminating the actual meal and reducing the ceremony to token eating.

- A. Paul's comments make it clear that, when he wrote, the Eucharist (narrowly speaking) was part of a larger dinner. Probably the blessed bread and the blessed wine were consumed respectively at the beginning and the

conclusion of the formal meal.

B. Because of the inequalities in consumption at this larger meal, Paul directs that people who are hungry should eat at home.

C. It is not clear to me whether Paul is eliminating the actual dinner, but at least he is taking a step in separating the Eucharist from normal eating.

IX. Ironically, this separation in subsequent church history bolstered a magical view of the sacrament.

A. Thanks in part to Paul's enormous influence, the Eucharist became fully separated from ordinary eating.

B. Consequently, it increasingly lost its communal dimensions. In Catholic history priests often celebrated the Mass alone.

C. Partly, as a result, during long periods of church history the Eucharist became the reception of "magical" food.

X. I believe that today many Christians are returning to a more covenantal understanding of the Eucharist.

Discussion: Have the Eucharists that you have attended been magical or covenantal? Does the Eucharistic situation at Corinth have any similarity to the situation in the church today, and are Paul's viewpoints helpful to us?

Assignment: Reread 1 Corinthians 10-11; study 1 Corinthians 12-14.

Spiritual Gifts; 1 Corinthians 12-14

Classroom sharing: Who has attended worship in which people spoke in tongues? What was your reaction?

Key quotes: 1 Corinthians 13:1: "If I speak in the tongues of humans and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong . . .

1 Corinthians 14:1: "Pursue love, and strive for the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy."

I. Before discussing the specific situation to which Paul's responds in 1 Corinthians 12-14, we need to discuss briefly what "tongues", "interpretation," and biblical prophecy actually are. Note: What Paul describes in 1 Corinthians seems similar to what "Charismatic" and Pentecostal Christians practice today.

A. "Tongues" are not a foreign language, but a random combination of sounds in one's own. Like tears and laughter, tongues allow someone to express emotion directly. Consequently, they can promote a special sharing and healing.

B. "Interpretation" of tongues, like the interpretation of tears and laughter, is not deciphering the meaning of the "words." Instead, when it is genuine, it is the identification of the cause of the emotion (which the speakers may not know).

C. Biblical prophecy is not, strictly speaking, predicting the future but announcing the judgment of God. The prophet first discerns how God feels

about current events and what God intends to do in response. The prophet then announces God's judgment, and the announcement is meant to improve behavior. Hence, "prophecy" in practice is inspired preaching.

II. Of course, both in ancient and modern times, many people have not understood what tongues, interpretation, and prophecy are.

III. The specific situation in respect to spiritual gifts that Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians.

A. Since Paul himself exercised the gift of tongues (1 Cor. 14:18), we must assume that he introduced the practice at Corinth himself.

B. After his departure, however, he became concerned about the exercise of tongues in the congregation. We cannot be certain, but it appears the following occurred.

1. At least some Corinthians began to regard tongues as the primary manifestation of the Holy Spirit and used them to justify the proud claim that they had received God's final blessings.

2. The uninhibited use of tongues produced chaos at community worship (14:26-33).

3. Paul became concerned that

a. People who did not have the gift would feel spiritually inferior (cf. ch. 12).

b. Outsiders visiting the assembly might reject Christianity as madness (14:23).

c. Uninhibited ecstasy might facilitate a return to Pagan practice (12:2-3). Cf. rock concerts and soccer matches.

IV. Once again, Paul was in an awkward position because he had to criticize and regulate tongues at Corinth while acknowledging their value in principle.

V. His basic theological argument: Tongues play an essential but very subordinate role in Christian life.

A. There are many spiritual gifts (12:1ff.).

B. The gifts are bestowed for the benefit of the community (and not, of course, for the aggrandizement of the individual who exercises the gift).

C. Since the gifts are complementary, all are essential, and since no one has all of the gifts, every person is essential.

D. Nevertheless, some gifts and persons contribute more to building up the community and, hence, are more important. Thus, love is the greatest gift (ch. 13). Note that without love all other gifts are useless because they no longer build up the community.

E. Prophecy is better than uninterpreted tongues, because prophecy edifies the whole congregation, whereas uninterpreted tongues edify only the speaker and disturb visitors (14:1-6).

F. Only faith, hope, and love will endure into the next life; other gifts, including tongues, are temporary (13:8-13). Note that faith, hope, and love endure because they allow us to embrace what is too great and mysterious for our minds to fathom and point us to future union with God.

VI. Paul's pastoral and administrative response.

A. He commends tongues to private prayer (cf. 14:18-19, 28).

- B. He urges people to concentrate on prophecy (14:1ff.).
- C. In public worship only two or three should speak in tongues, and then only if someone interprets so that the community may be edified (14:27-28).

VII. In evaluating all this, we need to remember that Paul's discussion is a response to the misuse of tongues and is not an objective and balanced treatment.

VIII. Some additional reflections on 1 Corinthians 12-14:

- A. Individuality comes through community. You can only be an eye as part of the body.
- B. Each person reveals God through their gift.
- C. In the church when someone gives a prophecy, others should weigh what is said (14:29).

IX. Discussion: How is our situation in respect to spiritual gifts like and unlike that at Corinth? Are Paul's comments helpful to us?

Towards an Understanding of Christian Love, especially as it appears in 1 Corinthians

Key quote: 1 Corinthians 13:2: "Even if I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, even if I have all faith that can move mountains, but I do not have love, I am nothing."

Key quote: 1 Corinthians 13:4-5: "Love is patient; love is kind. It is not jealous. Love is not boastful; it is not inflated. It does not behave disgracefully; it does not seek its selfish interests. It is not irritable; it does not hold grudges."

I. "Love" is the center of the Christian proclamation. We may especially note that Jesus insisted that the two great commandments were to love God with all one's being and to love one's neighbor as oneself (e.g., Mark 12:28-31) and that Paul stresses that by loving we fulfill the entire "law" (Rom. 13:8-10).

II. In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul underlines the centrality of love by insisting

- A. Love is the greatest spiritual gift.
- B. Without love none of the other gifts are useful.

III. Unfortunately, fundamental principles tend to be difficult to grasp, perhaps because there is nothing more basic that one can use to define them.

IV. Hence, for Christians love must in some sense always remain both a mystery and a gift, especially since love is the supreme expression of God who himself is the supreme mystery and gift in our lives.

V. Nevertheless, we should make some attempt to understand Christian "love."

VI. We may begin by noting that Christian love is an inner attitude which manifests itself in appropriate concrete acts of helping others.

- A. Beginning with Jesus himself Christianity has been concerned with the "heart" (i.e., the hidden core of one's personality).
- B. Paul in his letters often stresses his affection for the readers.
- C. The proof of one's affection is that it leads to concrete acts of self-

sacrifice for those loved when such acts are appropriate.

D. Paul in his letters often emphasizes the sacrifices that he has made for his readers.

VII. Let us compare two models for Christian love and the strengths and weaknesses of each.

A. The model of Christian love as one type of love—namely, self-sacrificing love.

1. According to this model there are several kinds of love.

a. Eros: Romantic love that gratifies the need for a sexual relationship; by extension “eros” can become any passionate, possessive love.

b. Philia: The affection between friends that gratifies our general need for fellowship.

c. Agape: Self-sacrificing love that primarily gratifies the needs of someone else without giving us any selfish benefit.

2. Christian love is agape, and Jesus definitively revealed it on the cross.

B. In evaluating this school of thought we may say

1. It does respect that

a. Greek does have different words for love, and usually the New Testament uses “agape” for Christian love. Note that in 1 Corinthians 13 Paul only discusses “agape.”

b. The New Testament insists that self-sacrifice is central, and this insistence is especially clear in Paul’s description of love in 1 Corinthians 13 (e.g., vs. 5: “Love does not seek its own interests.”).

2. Nevertheless, there are besetting problems with this model of love

a. Christian love is not merely self-sacrificing but longs for fellowship. Note that in the early church “agape” also was the name of a fellowship meal and that throughout 1 Corinthians Paul seeks to be reunited with the Corinthians and wants them to acknowledge him (e.g., 4:14-16).

b. Love that is purely self-sacrificing will inevitably begin to become either

1) patronizing

2) or masochistic.

B. The model that Christian love is the ideal blending of every type of legitimate love (Otto Bird, Donald Gelpi).

1. According to this model there are several types of love:

a. Gift love. I love you because you are in need.

b. Appreciative love: I love you because you are beautiful.

c. Need love: I love you because I need you.

2. The deepest form of love must combine all these dimensions.

3. In evaluating this school of thought we may say

a. All of these dimensions are necessary for the best love.

b. Nevertheless, there are problems:

1). The other school of thought is correct in emphasizing the primacy of self-sacrifice in the Christian proclamation.

2). In many cases this combination of love is virtually impossible if we concentrate on the way things are.

Thus, it is simply untrue that everyone is “beautiful.”

VIII. I think that we can combine the strengths of the two schools of thought by remembering that from a Christian perspective “the really real” is the eschatological and our freedom to choose. In 1 Corinthians Paul stresses how love points us to final salvation. Unlike other things, “love never ends” (1 Cor. 13:8). Hence,

A. Christian love must begin with self-sacrifice.

1. Our love is itself a response to the self-sacrifice of Jesus who died for us while we were sinners (e.g., Rom. 5:6-8).

2. This self-sacrifice allows us to become lovers.

3. In our own lives we must bestow undeserved love on others so that they may have the opportunity to grow. This self-sacrifice includes

a. Bearing the spiritual and psychological pain of others (e.g., as we listen to their problems).

b. Bearing the social pain of others (as we accept criticism for associating with them).

c. Bearing the financial burden of others.

B. Nevertheless, Christian love always looks forward in hope to union with the beloved, a union that will be an unspeakable blessing to us. Note, especially, that God looks forward to us becoming his “friends” when we will be utterly *lovely*.

C. As love looks forward, however, it respects the freedom of the other to accept or reject love and the growth that accepting love would necessitate.

D. As we look forward, we can see sinners as “beautiful,” but yet be realistic.

1. Their beauty consists in the fact that

a. Through God’s power (including God loving them through us) they can have the ability to choose to become better.

b. Because they are not yet living up to their potential, they are suffering (or are numb) now.

2. Nevertheless, we must respect their freedom to choose not to answer God’s call, and we must realize that in and of themselves they may not be beautiful and they may choose not to become so.

Assignment: Reread 1 Corinthians 12-14; study 1 Corinthians 15.

Belief in Future Resurrection; 1 Corinthians 15

Reflection and Discussion: There are at least three possible positions on

personal survival after death: 1) there is no personal survival, 2) there is personal survival after death, and our future well-being depends on whether we have lived ethically, 3) there is personal survival after death, but our future well-being has no relationship to how we have lived previously. Which position do you prefer and why? If you believe in "2," how are we rewarded or punished for our previous behavior?

Key quote: 1 Corinthians 15:12-14: "If Christ is preached that he was raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead. If there is no resurrection of the dead, neither has Christ been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is empty and your faith is empty."

- I. Some Corinthians did not believe in the resurrection (15:12), apparently because they could not conceive of bodily existence after death (15:35).
- II. Unfortunately, it is less clear what these Corinthians did believe.
- III. Perhaps they believed that in this life Christians already participate fully in Christ's resurrection through the Spirit (1 Cor. 4:8; cf. 2 Tim. 2:18). All that happens at physical death is that we lose our bodies.
- IV. Nevertheless, like modern skeptics who hold that death only leads to extinction, the Corinthians were in effect saying that what we presently experience is all that we can hope for.
- V. How the Corinthians may have come to their position.
 - A. Paul preached that Christ had risen and become Lord of the cosmos (cf., e.g., Phil. 2:6-11).
 - B. He also preached that Christ has given us his Spirit, and through her we participate in the resurrection and exercise such gifts as tongues and prophecy (cf. 1 Cor. 2:10-16).
 - C. The Corinthians interpreted Paul's theology through the Greek (Platonic) dichotomy of body and soul. The body is a prison from which the soul escapes at death.
 - D. They concluded that their souls had already been set free from the body and reached spiritual consummation, and, hence, the body was not important.
- VI. As we have seen, Paul was concerned about the implications (e.g., regarding sexual conduct) that the Corinthians drew from their rejection of future resurrection.
- VII. Paul's argument for the future resurrection of the body. Note that for Paul, in accordance with the Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures, "body" means the integral self.
 - A. Christ was raised. Paul appeals to eyewitness testimony, including his own.
 - B. Since his resurrection, Christ has begun taking control of the universe.
 - C. Belief in our own resurrection is necessary both for Christian ethics and Christian hope (15:19, 32).
 - D. Belief in the resurrection is presupposed in the liturgical practice at Corinth of baptism for the dead (15:29). Note: We have no idea what Paul

is alluding to here.

E. It is easy to conceive of the resurrection of the integral self without assuming we will have our present flesh (15:35-49).

1. There are many sorts of bodies.
2. Christ had a material body and now has a spiritual one.
3. We will bear Christ's image.

F. At some time in the near future Jesus will return, raise the dead and transform them, and, of course, transform those who are still alive (1 Cor. 15:50-53). Christ's resurrection in which he passed from an earthly existence to a heavenly one is the pattern for our own.

G. It is to be noted that Paul assumes that the resurrected dead will inhabit the earth which Christ will also transform and deliver from bondage to decay and death. (Rom 8:19-21).

VIII. Perhaps because Paul is addressing the Corinthians who are too enthusiastic about the Spirit, he does not argue here that the Holy Spirit has already given us the "down payment" of the resurrection nor does he mention that the spirits of the dead already dwell with Christ in heaven. These views appear in other letters (see below).

IX. We may note that a great strength of Paul's view that Christ will return to the earth and transform it is that it affirms the importance of making this world a better place.

A. If the primary goal of life is to go to heaven after death, there is always the temptation to regard improving this world as relatively unimportant.

B. And if this world is relatively unimportant, religion concentrates on saving people's souls.

C. This concentration allows religion to neglect improving social conditions here, and historically has even allowed Christians to acquiesce in social injustice.

D. Paul assumes that the goal of religion is to prepare for Christ to redeem the world and that Christ will build on the work we have already done.

E. Hence, Paul's vision lends urgency to the quest for social improvement.

F. But Paul does not naively assume that we can make the world perfect on our own, an assumption which historically has led both to

1. Totalitarian (e.g., Communist) attempts to make the world perfect.
2. Great disappointment.

X. Reflection

A. Since Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, three things have happened that invite us to re-evaluate belief in the resurrection.

1. Christ's second coming, which Paul believed would be soon, has delayed for thousands of years.
2. As a result, the church has placed increasing emphasis on the resurrection of the soul at the moment of death.
3. Recently, we have had numerous accounts of the self starting to leave the body at the time of death.
4. We can now recognize that the second coming was only one

possible interpretation of the resurrection experience that Jesus is alive and reigns as Lord.

B. On the basis of the above, it would seem that resurrection takes place at the moment of death.

C. Nevertheless, I believe that the experience of Christ's lordship does point to a consummation of history, as Paul held, and this consummation is important.

1. Making the world a much better place is part of God's plan.
2. God will achieve this through human effort and also despite human failings.
3. The dead who now live in "heaven" continue to care about this world and cannot be fully at peace until God's will is fulfilled on earth.

D. Moreover, Paul was right to insist that we should believe in the resurrection, not the immortality of the soul.

1. There is no evidence that we contain some inherently indestructible nucleus. In this life our consciousness depends on a fleshly body.
2. Presumably then, God raises us up by his power.
3. On the basis of out-of-body experiences, it seems that Paul was correct that we will have spiritual (i.e., wonderfully transformed) bodies.

E. Belief in the resurrection is essential for ethics and hope in their fullest form.

Discussion: What do you think of Paul's doctrine of the resurrection?

Assignment: Reread 1 Corinthians 15; then read Luke 1 and 1 Peter; study 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and 14:33-36.

Paul's Position on the Proper Role of Women in the Church, especially as illustrated by 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and 14:33-36

Reflection and Discussion: What role do women play in your church (or religious community)? What role should women play? Why?

Key quotes: 1 Corinthians 11:2-3: "I praise you that you remember me in every way and just as I handed on to you the traditions, you hold them fast. But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, but the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God."

1 Corinthians 11:11-12: "Nevertheless, neither is woman apart from man, nor man apart from woman in the Lord. For just as woman is from man, so also man is through woman."

Galatians 3:27-28: "All who have been baptized into Christ and have put on Christ. There is no Jew nor Greek; there is no slave nor free; there is no male and

female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

I. Normally, communities determine who they are and what they should do on the basis of three things.

- A. The vision of the founders, especially as expressed in authoritative documents (e.g., the United States Constitution).
- B. The subsequent decisions and practices of the community (e.g., court decisions regarding how to interpret the constitution).
- C. What seems sensible in the light of contemporary developments.

II. In the case of the Christian Church, we have

- A. The vision of people like Jesus and Paul
- B. The Church's tradition
- C. Contemporary Christian experience.

III. All Christians would hold that God helped guide each of these. Nevertheless, in practice, different denominations emphasize one of these three more than the others.

IV. Some contemporary churches tend to take the New Testament as their definitive guide and interpret it literally.

V. A number of New Testament texts urge that women be subordinate, and, partly because of these, some Christian groups restrict what women can do.

VI. Two of these texts occur in 1 Corinthians.

- A. 11:2-16 dictates that women wear veils, at least when praying and prophesying, and stresses that man was prior to woman and, apparently, superior.
- B. 14:33-36 dictates that women are to be silent in church.

VII. From a strictly scholarly point of view, these texts contain a number of problems.

- A. In 11:2-16 it is odd that Paul uses the word "authority" (instead of "veil") in 11:10 and that he first argues that man is prior (and so seemingly superior) to woman (11:3-9) and then goes on to show that the sexes have equal status "in the Lord" (11:11-12).
- B. 14:33-36 suggests that women are to be silent in Corinth as they are "in all the churches" (14:33; cf. 36). Yet, it appears that women like Priscilla were church leaders, and some women were even "apostles" (Rom. 16:7).
- C. 11:2-16 and 14:33-36 seem to conflict over whether or not women can speak in church, since 11:2-16 assumes women may pray and prophesy as long as they are veiled.

VIII. In response to these problems many scholars advocate separating 14:34-35 from its context or even regarding it as a later non-pauline addition to the text.

IX. In my opinion, such drastic solutions are unnecessary.

- A. There is no contradiction between 11:2-16 and 14:33-36, since 11:2-16 deals with women speaking in behalf of the Holy Spirit, whereas 14:33-36 deals with women (wives?) speaking their own minds while participating in general church discussion.
- B. The tension within 11:2-16 resulted from the fact that Paul told the Corinthians that in Christ "there is no male and female" (Gal. 3:28) and

now is rejecting some conclusions which the Corinthians drew. Note 11:2. Apparently, in their letter the Corinthians defended themselves by explicitly appealing to the tradition that Paul gave them.

C. Paul can claim that women are silent in other churches because in practice men had done most of the speaking, especially in the prestigious conservative church in Jerusalem.

X. The situation that led to Paul's comments on women in 1 Corinthians.

A. For his day, Jesus showed remarkable openness to the gifts and ministries of women.

1. He stressed the importance of mutual servanthood ("the first shall be last").
2. He had women disciples.
3. Such practices clashed with the patriarchalism of first century Palestine.

B. At least a few women (e.g., Mary Magdalene) had been prominent in the early church after the resurrection.

C. Apparently, in the radical movement that first brought Christianity to the Gentiles, women were especially prominent. Note the early slogan, "there is no Jew nor Greek; there is no slave nor free; there is no male and female" (Gal. 3:28).

D. When he founded the congregation, Paul taught that in Christ there was "no male and female," and at least Priscilla had played a leadership role.

E. Of course, the women, as well as the men, had received the Spirit and in her name had prayed, prophesied, and spoken in tongues.

F. However, after Paul's departure, the new status of women apparently began to cause problems.

1. Some women, presumably along with some men, got carried away with tongues and "wisdom."
2. Some women divorced their Pagan husbands and thereby endangered the church's good relations with the outside world.
3. There was at least the danger of sexual immorality.

G. These problems are understandable given the fact that in ancient Greece women were physically segregated, subject to their husbands, and uneducated. Hence, their status in the Corinthian church was higher than in the world. Not surprisingly, they did not always use this new power sensibly.

XI. In response to the situation Paul directed that the women should be conservatively clothed when prophesying or praying and should not participate in general church discussion.

XII. His actions were consistent with two theological principles that he held.

A. In the Lord men and women are theoretically equal.

B. In specific situations we adjust what we do to the needs of the moment as the Spirit leads us. Note 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.

XIII. Excursus: The status of women in later New Testament epistles.

A. In the Roman Empire there was great pressure for women and slaves to be subordinate and fear about what would happen if these groups got out of

hand.

B. Many epistles written after 1 Corinthians (Colossians, Ephesians, the Pastorals, 1 Peter) tell women to be subordinate.

C. These letters often link the subordination of women to that of slaves.

D. The opinion of outsiders is a major concern (note, e.g., 1 Tim. 6:1).

E. These writings reflect a situation in which the Church had to deal with increasing hostility from the Pagan world and was anxious to do as much as possible (without compromising core principles) to be respectable.

F. To be respectable, the Church sacrificed the principle of equality in favor of becoming all things to all people in order to avoid persecution and survive.

XIV. Some implications today.

A. It seems to me that we too must honor both the principles that in Christ men and women are equal and that the Church must respect the perspectives of the culture in which it exists.

B. Today in the United States these twin principles both demand that women have equality within the Church.

Assignment: Reread 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, 14:33-36; read 2 Corinthians.

Introduction to 2 Corinthians: The problem of the integrity of Paul's letters and, especially, of 2 Corinthians; the situation to which Paul responds in 2 Corinthians.

Key quotes: 2 Corinthians 2:12-13: "When I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and a door was opened for me in the Lord [i.e., there was an opportunity for effective evangelism], I had no relief in my spirit, because I did not find Titus, my brother. But taking my leave, I went off into Macedonia."

2 Corinthians 7:5-6 [note the gap of 5 chapters!]: "Even when we came into Macedonia, our flesh had no relief. Instead, we were afflicted in every respect, strife outside and inner anxiety. But the God who comforts the lowly, comforted us by the coming of Titus . . ."

2 Corinthians 7:16: "I [Paul] rejoice that I am confident in you in every respect."

2 Corinthians 13:2b " . . . to those who sinned before and to all the rest, if I come back, I will not spare you . . ."

Discussion: How do you explain the tensions between these quotes?

I. A number of Paul's letters have disturbing transitions.

A. Sometimes the mood shifts drastically.

B. Sometimes Paul drops a subject only to take it up later.

C. Sometimes we can even make a letter read more smoothly by omitting a passage.

II. To explain such problems, some scholars postulate that an editor rearranged Paul's letters after his death. According to this theory

- A. Paul's letters were not published during his lifetime.
 - B. After his death an editor (editors?) located the letters and decided to publish them.
 - C. By this time, the letters were falling apart.
 - D. In addition, the editor wished to make the letters relevant to the situation of a later day and to condense them as much as possible and reduce the costs of publication.
 - E. As a result, the editor recombined parts of letters and produced the problems we have today.
- III. Of course, we should only hypothesize that there was an editor if we cannot otherwise plausibly account for the epistles as we have them. Note that a later Christian publisher might have hesitated to change the writings of a hallowed figure from the past and should have hesitated to create the "problems."
- IV. Scholars who do not wish to postulate an otherwise unknown editor try to explain the problems in the epistles in at least two other ways.
- A. The letters were badly written.
 - 1. Paul dictated his letters under various kinds of pressure and probably did not have a chance to revise them.
 - 2. It took him a long time to compose the documents, and sometimes fresh news arrived when an epistle was already partly completed. In response to the news Paul would alter his tone and message.
 - B. Paul wrote the letters primarily to get people to adopt his viewpoint, and in order to do so he used complex rhetorical strategies.
- V. The argument that there was an editor is cumulative. If we can establish that an editor certainly intervened in one of the letters, then it becomes more likely that the editor intervened in others.
- VI. The letter which scholars who support the editorial hypothesis regard as the decisive proof is 2 Corinthians. Accordingly, we will consider in detail whether we must resort to an editor to explain the present form of the epistle.
- VII. There are at least three things in 2 Corinthians that some scholars insist must be the result of editorial tampering.
- A. There are sudden shifts in emotion. Note, especially, the change between the conclusion of chapter 9 and the beginning of chapter 10.
 - B. At two points Paul resumes a discussion that he abandoned earlier. Thus, 7:5 connects with 2:13 and 7:2 connects with 6:13.
 - C. 6:14-7:1 just does not seem to fit the rest of the letter.
- VIII. Consequently, many scholars argue that what we call 2 Corinthians consists of fragments from several originally independent epistles and that it was the editor who combined them. The issue of whether or not an epistle originally consisted of more than one letter is called the "integrity" (original wholeness) of the epistle.
- IX. It seems to me that at least some of the awkwardness of 2 Corinthians may be due to the traumatic conditions under which it was written.
- A. Paul emphasizes that he has recently been through a shattering time of suffering during which he apparently nearly died (2 Cor. 1:8-10).

- B. The Greek of the letter often borders on being incoherent.
- X. It also seems to me that we can explain the basic features of the letter by looking at Paul's diverse goals and how he used rhetoric to accomplish them.
 - A. Paul had two major goals which he pursued in very different ways.
 - 1. On the one hand, he wanted to get the Corinthians to contribute money for the collection which he was taking to the church in Jerusalem. To accomplish this goal, he flatters the Corinthians and challenges them to live up to this flattery. Paul concentrates on the collection in chapters 8-9.
 - 2. On the other hand, Paul wanted to get the Corinthians who had gone off after the "super apostles" to return to loyalty to him. To accomplish this goal, he rebukes the Corinthians and threatens them. Paul concentrates on the super apostles in chapters 10-13.
 - B. In light of these diverse goals and strategies, I think we can explain the odd composition of chapters 1-7.
 - 1. Paul needed to make his readers feel good at the end of chapter 7, since he would then discuss the collection in chapters 8-9.
 - 2. Yet, he also had to raise, at least in a preliminary way, some of the criticisms he had of the Corinthians' disloyalty.
 - 3. To make the letter seem positive at the end of chapter 7, Paul began the letter on a positive note which continues up to 2:13. Then he broke off the narrative and resumed it in at 7:5.
 - 4. To prepare for later criticisms of the super apostles, Paul raises painful issues between 2:13 and 7:5 and becomes very challenging in 6:14-7:1. Note that 6:14-7:1 comes just before Paul returns to a positive evaluation. Note too that in 6:14-7:1 Paul warns the Corinthians not to be "mismatched with unbelievers" and that Christians can have no fellowship with Christ and Beliar (i.e., Satan). In chapters 10-13 Paul will insist that the super apostles are "false apostles" and compare them to Satan (2 Cor. 11:13-15).
- XI. As in the case of 2 Corinthians, I think we can explain the "problems" in the other pauline epistles without having to postulate an editor. I will attempt to provide an explanation for Philipians below.
- XII. On the assumption that 2 Corinthians was always a single letter, we can briefly sketch the situation that led to the epistle.
 - A. When the Corinthians received what we call 1 Corinthians, their reaction was apparently mixed.
 - 1. On the one hand, they disciplined someone whose behavior had offended Paul (2:5-11, 7:12). Perhaps this person was the one who had been living with his father's wife (1 Cor. 5:1-5).
 - 2. On the other hand, they were not enthusiastic about Paul's request in 1 Corinthians 16 that they contribute to a collection for the church at Jerusalem (cf. 2 Cor. 8-9).
 - B. Paul sent Titus to the congregation and perhaps also paid a visit himself.
 - C. At some point, however, Paul caused consternation by first promising to visit and then failing to appear (2 Cor. 1:15-2:1).

D. Then some Christian missionaries arrived who had no connection to Paul and tried to take over the leadership of the congregation. From 2 Corinthians we can reconstruct at least a few things about them.

1. They had letters of recommendation from other congregations and expected the Corinthians in turn to write such letters (3:1).
2. They were Jewish and made a great deal of that fact (11:22).
3. They apparently had great spiritual gifts and boasted of them. Among other things the "super apostles"
 - a. Were impressive preachers (cf. 11:6)
 - b. Saw visions (cf. 12:1)
 - c. Worked miracles (12:12).
4. They expected the Corinthians to pay them.
5. Perhaps they claimed to have known Jesus (cf. 2 Cor. 5:16).

E. To solidify their leadership, they attacked Paul.

1. They alleged that Paul was not a real apostle and yet lorded over people (cf., e.g., 1:24).
2. They made fun of Paul's poor preaching (11:6), and said that his letters, while weighty, were difficult to understand (cf., 1:13).
3. They pointed out Paul's physical disability and suggested that if he were really spiritual, God would have healed him (cf. 12:7-9).
4. They criticized Paul's refusal to accept payment from the congregation and suggested that Paul was planning to pilfer the collection he was soliciting for the church at Jerusalem (cf., e.g., 12:16).
5. They said that Paul was a little crazy (5:13).

F. When Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, the "super-apostles" probably had already left (3:1), but Paul still had to reply to the charges they had leveled against him.

XIII. Not surprisingly, in 2 Corinthians, Paul simply denies many of the allegations (e.g., that he was using the collection to take advantage of the congregation).

XIV. However, from a modern perspective the most interesting theme in the letter is Paul's insistence that his various types of weakness (e.g., his sickness) were actually an asset. Accordingly, we will look at this insistence in detail.

Assignment: Reread 2 Corinthians.

Strength in Weakness in 1 and, especially, 2 Corinthians

Reflection and Discussion: What is a spiritual person? Should a spiritual person see visions, work miracles, and preach eloquently?

Key quote: 2 Corinthians 12:9: "He [Christ] said to me, 'My grace is enough for you [Paul] for power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore, I will boast most gladly in my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ dwell within me."

- I. Paul was a person both of extraordinary gifts and weaknesses.
 - A. He was a tremendously persistent and dynamic missionary, and, as is still evident today, he was a profound thinker and powerful writer.
 - B. However, he was apparently a poor speaker (e.g., 2 Cor. 10:10), and he suffered from some highly visible physical problem ("thorn in the flesh" [2 Cor. 12:7]). In addition, he had difficulty accepting financial support for himself.
- II. Because of his extraordinary gifts and weaknesses he gained many critics.
 - A. His gifts made him a powerful leader and invited others to be jealous of his position.
 - B. His weaknesses gave his critics ammunition, especially since at Corinth people believed that, thanks to the Spirit, Christians already were enjoying the fullness of God's blessings.
- III. Accordingly, even in 1 Corinthians Paul has to defend his poor speaking (1 Cor. 1:17, 2:1-4) and his refusal to accept financial support (1 Cor. 9:3ff.).
- IV. In 2 Corinthians Paul defends himself at length. The reason he had to do so was that some missionaries ("super apostles") arrived who boasted of their spiritual achievements, including their ability to work miracles and see visions (2 Cor. 10-12). In order to assert their own authority, they had to undermine Paul's, and they suggested that Paul's weaknesses proved that he was unspiritual.
- V. In response, Paul articulated a profound theology of the interrelation of weakness and power in the Christian life and the usefulness of weakness for Christian witness.
- VI. As Christians we live simultaneously in two realities
 - A. The present fallen world which is subject to sin and death. Note that despite our confession of Christ we are still in the "flesh."
 - B. The Spirit which is the down payment of future eternal life.
- VII. This dichotomy itself points to power in the midst of weakness. Our outward selves, which are subject to this world, decay. Meanwhile, our inward selves grow through the renewal of the Spirit (2 Cor. 4:16). Indeed, inwardly we are "transformed from one degree of glory to the next" (2 Cor. 3:18).
- VIII. Hence, in the Christian life we are both utterly weak and unimaginably strong.
 - A. In and of ourselves we are utterly weak, since we are subject to the assaults of this world and have little power in ourselves to resist them.
 - B. Yet, we are also unimaginably strong. As we are faithful to God, his power repeatedly enters into us and allows us to endure triumphantly.
- IX. As a result, the Christian life involves both suffering and triumphant hope.
 - A. We suffer through the assaults of this fallen world. These assaults involve moral temptation, persecution, sickness, and death.
 - B. Yet, we have hope, because we repeatedly experience God's saving power in the midst of our sufferings. This repeated experience produces character and the expectation of final deliverance. With this hope comes joy (e.g., Rom. 5:3-5).
- X. Our weakness is finally a great blessing in our own lives, because it forces us to rely on God's power and enables us to be centered in him. We are delivered from

boasting in ourselves.

XI. Even more, our weakness is a great blessing in our preaching and teaching.

A. As Christians our primary temptation is to rely on our own strength and to teach others either to rely on us or on themselves.

B. When we are strong through the gifts of this world, it is easy for us to invite others to rely on our eloquence or wisdom or power. And it is easy for them to accept our invitation.

C. Moreover, when we are strong through the power of this world, it is difficult for others to see the power of God when it too is working through us.

D. However, when we are obviously weak in this world, people are more able to perceive that the power working through us is really God's power.

E. Consequently, our life and work give hope to others. They realize that through God they too can have the power that we have.

F. In addition, they realize that we are only their servants, and they do not make the mistake of becoming centered in us.

G. Our own weakness allows us to accept the weakness of others and comfort them, and it allows them to accept their own weakness (e.g., 2 Cor. 1:4ff., 11:29).

H. Hence, God's power is "brought to completion in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9).

I. As a result, we can even boast of our weaknesses because they point others to God. Note that Paul avoids self-denigration or self-centered adulation.

J. Perhaps most important, our weaknesses and God's strength shining through them re-present the death and resurrection of Jesus and thereby reiterate the fundamental Christian message (e.g., 2 Cor. 4:10).

K. Our weakness points us and others to eternal life, and, of course, not to success in this present world.

XII. Reflection: Because Paul is responding to criticisms of his own weakness, his presentation on the helpfulness of weakness is one-sided and exaggerated.

XIII. Nevertheless, I believe the presentation is profound and helpful.

Discussion: How do you react to Paul's presentation on strength and weakness?

Can you think of your own weaknesses as a spiritual asset? Do you think that people with severe disabilities (e.g., Helen Keller) can bear a special witness to God or to other spiritual realities? What can we learn from such people?

Assignment: Read Deuteronomy 22-32 and Galatians.

Galatians and the Problem of Whether Gentiles Should Adopt the Law

Key quote: Galatians 6:14: "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. For neither is circumcision anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation is everything."

- I. The Mosaic Law divided Jews from Gentiles.
 - A. In the Hebrew Scriptures (the Christian Old Testament) God gives the law to the Israelites and promises to bless them if they keep it.
 - B. Culturally, the law was the basis for Jewish identity and tended to limit contact with outsiders.
 - C. Much of the law (esp., circumcision) was objectionable to Gentile society.
- II. The first Christians had all been Jewish and had basically kept the law.
- III. Paul before his conversion was a Pharisee and had been zealous for the law (e.g., Phil. 3:4-6).
- IV. At his Christian call, however, he received a commission to preach a law-free gospel to Gentiles. Note that only such a gospel had any hope of winning large numbers of Pagan converts.
- V. Accordingly, Paul's attitude toward the law was paradoxical.
 - A. On the one hand, he had nothing against the law.
 - 1. Jews were free to keep it.
 - 2. When he was among Jews, he even kept it himself (e.g., 1 Cor. 9:20).
 - B. On the other hand, he insisted the law was not necessary for salvation. Someone could be a Christian without following the law and even inherit the scriptural promises which were given to those under the law.
- VI. Paul's law-free gospel was controversial, and he continually had to explain and defend it.
- VII. Two related theological issues were especially troublesome:
 - A. Why do not Gentiles have to keep the law if they become part of God's people?
 - B. If keeping the law is not necessary, why did God give it?
- VIII. The first of these issues is prominent in Galatians; the second, in Romans. Note that these epistles have had a powerful influence on Protestantism.
- IX. Paul wrote Galatians to churches he founded in Asia Minor (modern Turkey), though there is debate over whether the epistle was to Northern (i.e., Celtic) or Southern (i.e., Greek) Galatia. There is also some question concerning when Paul wrote the letter. Perhaps the best guess is that the letter was for Celtic Galatia and Paul composed it shortly before he wrote Romans, since Romans gives a more detailed and balanced treatment of the ideas found in Galatians. Perhaps Paul received criticism for his one-sided presentation in Galatians and needed to explain his position further.
- X. Despite these uncertainties, the basic situation which led to the letter to the Galatians is clear.
 - A. When Paul came to Galatia, he preached his law-free gospel, and founded a number of congregations.
 - B. These were composed primarily (exclusively?) of Gentiles, and, at first, no one questioned Paul's teaching.
 - C. After his departure, however, the congregations somehow got the idea that they should adopt at least the basics of the Mosaic Law.
 - 1. Probably they got this idea from a more conservative Jewish-

- Christian missionary who arrived after Paul.
2. But it is possible that they came to the conclusion that they must follow the Mosaic Law from studying the Bible on their own.
- D. When Paul wrote, the Galatians were already observing some of the Jewish calendar (Gal. 4:10) and at least considering getting circumcised (e.g., 5:2).
- XI. The Galatians seem to have come to the following conclusions:
- A. Paul dropped the legal requirements himself, and he did so primarily to ingratiate himself to the Gentiles (cf. Gal. 1:10).
 1. He got his gospel from the church in Jerusalem.
 2. However, on his own authority he changed it to win converts.
 - B. Previously the law had always been part of the gospel.
 1. God himself gave the law, and it is central to the scripture and the heritage of Israel.
 2. Jesus lived under the law (cf. Gal 4:4).
 3. The real leaders of the church, such as James and Cephas (i.e., Peter), live by it.
 4. Originally, Paul himself lived by the law (cf. 5:11), and he still observes it when it is expedient.
 - C. Adopting the law is necessary to receive the ancient promises which God gave along with the law.
 - D. The law helps us resist sin (cf. 5:16ff.).
 - E. Nevertheless, it is not necessary to adopt every detail of the law, but only the most basic things, such as circumcision and the observance of major holy days (cf. 5:3). Note that Jesus did not keep the whole law.
- XII. These positions contained at least some truth, but they completely denied both Paul's vocation and theology, and he had to oppose them vigorously.
- A. Such legalism would make Paul's cultural accommodation and, hence, his mission to the Gentiles impossible.
 - B. It would also imply that God is known and served through external things rather than the inner presence of Jesus in the Spirit.
- XIII. In reply to the accusation that Paul debased the gospel, Galatians points out
- A. His gospel came through direct revelation, and he preached it before he ever saw the leaders of the Jerusalem church.
 - B. Subsequently, they recognized and confirmed it.
 - C. It is not Paul but his opponents who water down the gospel to gain human approval and avoid persecution (e.g., 6:12-13). Apparently, non-Christian Jews resented Christian Jews who associated with Gentiles.
- XIV. In reply to the theology that the law is necessary, Paul argues that the law is part of this world, and Christ has delivered us from this world (e.g., Gal. 1:3-4, 6:15).
- A. Paul assumes there are two lordships.
 1. That of this present fallen existence.
 2. That of Christ.
 - B. The Old Testament was written under the present evil age but looked forward to the coming savior.

1. The promises to Abraham looked forward to Christ and the salvation he would bring.
 2. The law was a temporary restraint until salvation would come.
 3. Note that in line with the custom of his own day Paul often interprets scripture figuratively. Hence, his scriptural argumentation is not always easy for a modern reader to follow.
- C. By his death on the cross and the gift of the Spirit, Christ has made it possible to become free from this present age and its law.
- D. We receive this freedom when in trust
1. We surrender to Christ's love by accepting his sacrificial death and the Spirit as a free gift.
 2. And enter a new Israel in which there is "no Jew or Greek," "slave or free," "male and female" (3:28; cf. 6:15-16).
- E. By this acceptance Christ dwells in us through the Spirit and we die to self.
- F. Consequently, we gain the freedom to do what is right, which is basically loving our neighbors as ourselves (Gal. 5:14-15).
- G. Hence, to adopt the law after Christian conversion is to reject the gospel.
1. To adopt the law is to return to this fallen age.
 2. It is to reject God's loving gift.
 3. It is to state that what Christ did was not enough. Accordingly, it makes his death pointless (2:21).
 4. It is to return to an ethnically divided spiritual community.
- H. Moreover, if one does adopt the law, then it must be the entire law. Once we have made the law the ultimate authority, we have no basis to critique it.
- XV. A brief reflection: The relevance of what Galatians is saying.
- A. We can keep the "rules" out of a sense of ethical obligation and a fear of punishment, or we can do goodness out of the power of having been loved by God in Christ.
- B. If we do the first, we are living out of this world's resources, and our goodness will be self-centered and grudging.
- C. If we do the second, we are living in response to Jesus. Consequently, our goodness will come from the heart, and we will become one with God in Christ.
- D. Hence, to return to the bondage of ethics is to forsake the gospel.
- E. To be sure, I think we still need the "law," but only until the power of love controls us.
- F. Being enslaved to any social code inhibits fellowship with people from other cultures, whereas putting love before "law" enables such fellowship.
- G. An ethnic religion cannot save the world.
- (time permitting) Pictures of places in ancient Galatia, especially, in cities where Acts records that Paul did missionary work.
- Assignment: Reread Galatians; read Romans and Genesis 1-11; study Romans 1-3.

Introduction to Romans: The Original Form of Romans; Paul's Specific Goal in Writing; His Strategy in Pursuing that Goal; the Basic Structure of the Letter

Key quotes: Romans 1:16-17: "I will not be put to shame by the good news, since it is the power of God to save everyone who has faith, both the Jew first and the Greek. In it the righteousness of God is revealed by faith for faith, just as it is written, 'Those who are set right through faith will live.'"

Romans 15:24-25: "When I go to Spain, I hope to see you as I pass through and to be helped on my way there by you when I first have enjoyed your company for a while. But now I am going to Jerusalem to aid Christians there."

- I. We know that in ancient times some copies of Romans lacked chapters 15-16 and the references to "Rome." Many of the surviving manuscripts have various irregularities that reflect this older situation.
- II. Probably, after Paul's death, when the letter was first published, someone tried to make it more "universal" by deleting material that referred only to the specific situation Paul had been addressing.
- III. 16:24 and 16:25-27 were added to this truncated epistle. The location of these brief sections vary in the manuscripts, and a few manuscripts do not have them at all.
- IV. The original letter probably consisted of 1:1-16:23.
- V. There has been continuing debate as to why Paul wrote Romans. Three positions have been popular.
 - A. Paul wrote Romans as a "last will and testament." He realized that his upcoming trip to Jerusalem was very dangerous and that he might be killed. Consequently, he produced a final statement of his mature thought.
 - B. Paul wrote Romans to help reconcile two factions in the Roman church, the "Weak" and the "Strong." Note that in chapters 14-15 Paul gives advice on how to heal the split.
 - C. Paul wrote Romans to gain support for his upcoming missions to Jerusalem and, especially, to Spain.
- VI. The first two positions have weaknesses and should be abandoned.
 - A. The first position suffers from these defects.
 1. It seems unlikely that Paul would have written his last will and testament to a congregation that he did not found and had never visited.
 2. Romans does not address many issues that were personally important to Paul (e.g., speaking in tongues, the Eucharist).
 3. Paul was constantly facing persecution and often in danger of death. Hence, we should not assume that his imminent trip to Jerusalem would have caused him to write a theological "testament."
 - B. The second position does not explain why Paul thought he could interfere helpfully in the inner life of a congregation he had never visited. Paul was a very controversial figure in the early church, and conservative

Jewish Christians were uncomfortable with him.

VII. I think Paul wrote the Epistle primarily to gain the support of the church at Rome for his upcoming missions to Jerusalem and, especially, to Spain (15:23-32).

A. He felt that his missionary work in the Eastern Mediterranean was essentially over.

B. Now he planned to take the collection from his Gentile churches to Jerusalem and then go by way of Rome to Spain where he would engage in a new evangelistic mission.

C. Paul needed the support of the Roman church for these new activities, and he asks for this support in the letter.

1. Paul needed support for his trip to Jerusalem.

a. People in Jerusalem probably were under the misimpression that Paul was encouraging Jews in the Diaspora (Jewish communities outside of Palestine) to give up following the Mosaic Law (Acts 21:20-21).

b. Hence, non-Christian Jews hated Paul, and it was very dangerous for him to go to Jerusalem.

c. Even the church at Jerusalem was not eager to have him visit and was reluctant to accept money that came from Paul's Gentile churches. Close association with Paul and his churches would antagonize public opinion and might lead to persecution. Moreover, conservative Jewish Christians in Jerusalem disagreed with Paul's policy of allowing Gentiles to become Christians without getting circumcised.

d. Consequently, it was by no means clear that Paul would survive going to Jerusalem, or that the church there would receive him and the offering he was bringing from the Gentiles.

2. Therefore, Paul asks the Roman church to pray for the success of his mission. We may suspect that Paul was also hoping that the Roman church would encourage the church in Jerusalem to receive and support him.

3. Paul particularly needed support for his future work in Spain, and the church in Rome was in a position to give such support.

a. The mission to Spain posed special challenges for Paul.

1). Spain was distant.

2). There were few Jews in Spain, and in his previous missionary work Paul had initially relied on people who were Jewish or at least were sympathetic to Judaism.

3). The dominant language in Spain was Latin, not Greek, and Paul (and his assistants) probably did not know much Latin.

b. The Roman congregation was especially equipped to give Paul the help he needed.

- 1). It was probably the closest Christian community to Spain.
 - 2). It was a large church (Rom. 16).
 - 3). It certainly had bilingual members who could serve as translators for Paul.
 4. Paul hints generously that when he leaves Rome to go to Spain, the church could give him what he needs (15:24).
- VIII. There were two major barriers to getting support from the Roman church.
- A. At least some (Jewish) Christians in Rome apparently believed that Paul's preaching of a lawfree gospel was
 1. Leading to immorality (cf. Rom. 3:8).
 2. Demeaning to the Church's Jewish heritage
 3. Hindering the efforts of other Christian missionaries who were trying to convert Jews.
 - B. The Roman church was itself divided between conservative Jews (the "weak") who insisted on following the Mosaic Law and more liberal Christians (the "strong") who observed few, if any, distinctively Mosaic customs. Of course, the church could not give full support to Paul unless the two sides were able to work together.
- IX. To gain the full support of the Roman church, Paul had to
- A. Show that despite his insistence that the Gentiles should not adopt the Law, he was not preaching immorality
 - B. Convince Jewish Christians that he believed that the Mosaic Law was good
 - C. Explain why, despite the goodness of the law, the law was not necessary for Gentiles
 - D. Show that his mission to the Gentiles was actually helping convert the Jews too
 - E. Help end the division between conservatives and liberals in the Roman church and make him look like a reconciler (rather than a polarizer).
- X. In my opinion, the basic theme of the epistle is that the gospel (which, of course, Paul preaches) is for the "Jew first and also for the Greek" (esp., 1:16; 2:9-10) and can be a basis for unifying the church internally and for saving the entire world from sin and death.
- XI. The bulk of the letter consists of four basic sections: 1:17-3:30, 3:21-8:39, 9:1-11:36, 12:1-15:13, and we will now consider them in order.
- Assignment: Study Romans 1-3, 5, 7.

Romans 1:17-3:20: Why the World--Whether Jew or Greek--Needs the Gospel Which Paul Preaches

Key quotes: Romans 1:19-24: "Although they [the Gentiles] knew God, they did not glorify him as God or give thanks, but they thought about foolish things and their stupid mind was darkened. As they asserted that they were wise, they became fools, and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for the likeness of a perishable image of a human being and of birds and of quadrupeds, and of

reptiles. Therefore God handed them over in the lusts of their minds to filth . . . "

Romans 2:21-24: "You [a Jew] who teach another do not teach yourself. You who preach not to steal do steal. You who say not to commit adultery do commit adultery. You who abhor idols rob temples. You who boast in the Law dishonor God through the violation of the Law. 'For the reputation of God is slandered among the Pagans because of you,' just as the Bible records."

Romans 5:12-14: " . . . Sin entered into the world through one human being, and death entered through sin, and thus death came to all people, because all sinned. For until the Law [was given], sin was in the world, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam until Moses even over those who did not sin in the manner that Adam did. Adam pointed forward to the one was to come."

Romans 7:7-13 "Is the Law sin? Certainly not; rather, I would not have recognized sin except through the Law. I would not have perceived coveting if the Law did not say, 'You shall not covet.' But sin taking an opportunity through the commandment produced in me all covetousness. Without the Law, sin is impotent. Formerly, I was alive when I did not have the Law, but when the commandment came, sin came to life, and I died. The commandment which was supposed to lead to life, this commandment turned out to be death for me. Sin taking an opportunity through the commandment deceived me and through it killed me. Accordingly, the Law is holy and the commandment holy and righteous and good. So did what was good become fatal to me? Certainly not, but sin, in order that it might be exposed as sin, produced death in me through what was good, that sin might become utterly sinful through the commandment."

I. To gain support for his upcoming missionary work, Paul in the first major section of the epistle reminds the Roman Christians why the world needs to hear the gospel. Hence, he begins by detailing the desperate state of humanity apart from Christ.

II. Since Paul as a Jew naturally thought of the world as composed of Jews and Gentiles and since in the congregation to which he was writing Jews and Gentiles were having some difficulty getting along, Paul

A. Begins by describing the wretchedness of Pagans who do not know Christ

B. Goes on to show that the Jews who do not know Christ are no better off. In this part of his presentation Paul warns Jews not to feel smug and boast against the Gentiles.

III. By giving this balanced treatment of the Jews and Gentiles, Paul avoids antagonizing either of the two factions in the Roman church.

IV. To understand Paul's argument in detail in 1:17-3:30, we will also have to draw on other material in the epistle where Paul further justifies the position he takes in these opening chapters.

V. As he is arguing that apart from Christ the Jews are as lost as the Gentiles, Paul

states that Gentiles who do not possess the Mosaic Law still have some knowledge of what God requires and to a limited degree can even fulfill it and be vindicated at the last judgment (Rom. 2:14-15, 26-27). From a rhetorical perspective this brief part of the letter is primarily to make the Jews look bad. However, it has rightly also been used in Christian history to justify the claim that non-Christians have virtues and will be saved if they follow their consciences and is especially appealing today.

VI. Nevertheless, Paul's overall presentation of Pagan life is highly negative.

VII. Paul's analysis of the origin and evolution of Gentile sinfulness is complex and interesting. He says

- A. Through creation God has always revealed himself even to the Gentiles.
- B. However, they chose not to glorify God because of their self-centeredness and became preoccupied with idle speculation.
- C. Consequently, by God's just decree, they lost their awareness of the true God and began to worship idols.
- D. Sins of the flesh followed.
- E. Sinners know that they deserve God's punishment, and yet they approve of sinful actions.

VIII. In part Paul's argument here reflects traditional Jewish polemics against idolatry and "perverse" sexual activity. Paul passes on Jewish prejudices as to how idolatry arose and produced other evils (cf. The Wisdom of Solomon 12-14).

IX. Nevertheless, Paul's presentation is, as far as I can tell, also profoundly original. Here is a theological synthesis of Paul's argument and the assumptions that seem to underlie it:

- A. Being centered in God naturally leads to conduct that is righteous and life-giving.
- B. Praise and thanksgiving make one centered in God.
- C. However, as human beings, we have an impulse toward self-centeredness and tend to withhold the praise and thanksgiving God is due.
- D. To justify our self-centeredness, we come up with perverse understandings of who God is and how we should relate to him. Or to say the same thing in secular terms, we come to a different understanding of the meaning and goal of life.
- E. As a result, we lose contact with God and begin worshiping something else, such as money or sexual gratification. Note that in polytheistic idolatry, the images are often personifications of such things (Col. 3:5).
- F. This false worship inevitably distorts our desires and produces concrete acts of sinfulness. For example, our worship of sexual love leads to lust which in turn leads to promiscuity; or our worship of money leads to greed which in turn leads to dishonesty.
- G. Despite our attempts to avoid facing the truth, we nevertheless know that what we are doing is wrong and will lead to judgment.
- H. To insulate ourselves from this knowledge, we praise each other's sinfulness and thus encourage one another to sin even more. Such commendation of evil becomes a basis for community life.
- I. Of course, such communal approval will not protect us from

condemnation at the last judgment.

X. For what it is worth, I think that Paul was basically correct in his analysis of sin in the ancient world and, alas, also correct about sin in contemporary America.

XI. After Paul shows that without the gospel, the Gentile world is fundamentally corrupt, he then goes on to claim that without the gospel the Jewish world is equally corrupt. According to Paul,

A. The Jews boast in the law and lecture others about the need to keep it and are judgmental toward the sins of others.

B. Nevertheless, in practice Jews do the very things the law condemns.

C. Such hypocrisy causes Pagans to revile the God of Israel.

D. Yet, the Jews assume that they are not liable to God's judgment. Of course, this assumption itself is presumptuous and sinful.

E. Hence, the Jews also face the danger of condemnation at the final judgment.

XII. I will not presume to say whether Paul's negative portrayal was appropriate for first century Jews (or other people who taught high moral standards), but I can state that his portrayal is, alas, accurate for many moralists today.

XIII. Later in 5:12-21 and 7:5-25, Paul explains why the Law by itself does not allow people to live holy lives.

A. Some points Paul makes in 5:12-21:

1. Adam, the first human being, sinned and, as a result, became subject to death.

2. Through that primordial misdeed and punishment, sin and death passed to everyone.

3. People sin both because of their inheritance and their free choice.

4. Before the law was given, sin was in the world producing death, but was somehow less serious.

5. When the (Mosaic) law was given, sin abounded (i.e., became more serious and also more common).

B. A synthesis of 7:5-25. This passage deals with the problem of sin and law from the inner perspective of the sinner and explains why law causes sin to abound.

1. Before we know the law, we are in sin, but we are not fully aware of it, and so we are relatively well off.

2. When we receive the law, we learn that we are sinners (and recognize that our sin is harming ourselves and others), and we rejoice in the truth and the righteousness of the law's moral demands.

3. Nevertheless, knowing what we should do does not give us the power to do it, and, consequently, we do not in fact live better.

a. To the extent that we succeed in following individual regulations by our own power, we become more self-centered.

b. To the extent that we fail, we experience shame which makes us weaker and less able to resist sin.

c. Indeed, the law stirs up rebellion in us, and we sin even more. When part of society orders us around, we resist.

Similarly, when part of our personality orders around or condemns another part, the latter resists.

4. Hence, we end up alienated from ourselves and in despair.

XIV. A personal summary of Paul's major ideas about sin, law, and death. It may not be possible to reconcile all of the perspectives Paul offers. Nevertheless, I think the following represents at least the core of what Paul is saying:

A. The ultimate cause of sin is being centered in self, not in God. Note that this was Adam and Eve's sin. They did not want to obey God but to be God.

B. This self-centeredness leads to distorted desires which in turn lead to concrete acts of sin.

C. The destructive effects of other people's sins get passed down through history and inspire new sin. Sin is a super-human power at loose in the world, not just a set of individual choices.

D. Sin always produces death but is relatively less destructive when we do not recognize that what we are doing is wrong.

E. Ethical instruction enables us to understand that we are destroying ourselves and others, and it gives us a vision of perfection. Hence, "the law" does cause part of us to rejoice.

F. By itself, however, knowledge of the law does not give us the power to obey the law but instead produces alienation, despair, and more sinful actions. We feel alienated from God, since our actions merit his punishment, and alienated from our own selves, since we cannot in fact do the good things we want to do. This alienation leads to further destructive behavior.

XV. Of course, in Christian retrospect this final state of sin and despair is all right. Paul writes about sin and law from the perspective of someone who has already been delivered from their power.

A. If we could keep the law on our own, we could boast--and self-centeredness was the fundamental problem which led to all the other difficulties.

B. The law, by showing us what is right and not giving us the power to do it, bears witness to Christ, for, as we shall see, Christ gives us the power to do what is right.

XVI. We may note in passing that Paul's discussion of sin and law explains to Jews why the law is good, explains to the Gentiles why the law is unnecessary, and explains to everyone why Paul is not advocating libertine behavior.

A. The law is "holy, just, and good" because it enshrines proper ethical standards, tells us the truth about ourselves, and prepares us to receive Christ.

B. The law is unnecessary for Christians.

1. It does not get at the ultimate cause of sin and instead causes sin to abound.

2. Its primary function was to prepare us for Christ.

C. Even though the law is unnecessary, Paul is not advocating license because sin (even when you do not know it is sin!) always produces death.

Discussion

Assignment: Study Romans 3:21-8:39

Romans 3:21-8:39--How the Gospel Brings Salvation

Key quote: Romans 5:1-11: "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we also have access to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in the hope of the glory of God; and not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us because God's love has been poured in our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us. For, while we were still weak still Christ died at the proper time for the ungodly."

I. Having shown that salvation cannot come through the Mosaic Law, Paul must show that there is another path which is the same for both Jews and Gentiles and which, at least in some sense, vindicates the law.

II. Romans makes it clear that this other path involves justification through faith. Note the literary prominence of this theme in the letter (already 1:17).

III. For Paul's immediate goal of unifying Christian Jews and Gentiles, the concept of justification by faith was very useful.

A. Jewish and Gentile Christians shared the same basic faith--both believed we are saved by trusting in Jesus and his work.

B. Both groups could appreciate Paul's appeal to the primordial faith of Abraham (Rom. 4).

1. Abraham was the ancestor of the Jews and a national hero.

2. Abraham believed before he got circumcised (i.e., before he received the distinctive sign of being Jewish), and God promised that he would be the father of many nations.

IV. The meaning of "justification by faith."

A. Faith

1. A special kind of trust which is itself a response to the undeserved faithfulness of God, especially as revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus for us.

2. It includes elements of intellectual assent, such as Jesus died for our sins. For Paul faith is not blind trust. We can only have faith in God because God has already shown himself to be faithful.

3. Faith necessarily leads to obedience. If you do not obey God, then you do not trust him!

4. For Paul faith is a gift from God, but, like other gifts, one that we must accept.

a. Faith comes from hearing the Christian message preached (10:14-17).

b. Plus receiving the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the transforming presence of the risen Christ in our inner selves and our communities.

- c. Nevertheless, to benefit from the preaching and to receive the Spirit, we must freely welcome God into our lives and follow his leading.

B. Justification

1. Clearly, it involves righteousness (justice).
2. The more difficult issue is whether it means "account as righteous" or "make righteous."
 - a. On the one hand, Paul clearly states that God out of his own goodness disregards our sins and "justifies" us (e.g., 4:6).
 - b. On the other hand, linguistically the verb ought to mean "make righteous," and Paul insists that in the end God will judge us on the basis of "works" (e.g., 2:6).
3. My own solution (building on the viewpoint of E.P. Sanders) is that justification in Paul is primarily a "transfer term." God disregards our sins by inviting us into the fellowship of his Son at baptism, and through this fellowship we become righteous. Note that Paul regards sins as part of God's punishment for Sin (see previous lecture).
 - a. "Justification" is the beginning of the Christian life (cf. 5:1ff.).
 - b. God invites us to be baptized, enter the church, and receive the Holy Spirit despite our sins.
 - c. As a result, we die to our old selves and gain the power to live righteously.
 - d. At the last judgment, all Christians will be saved, but will have to suffer (temporarily) for whatever sins they committed (Sanders; cf. 1 Cor. 3:13-15). Paul does not give us a clear presentation of what happens to non-Christians.

V. The basis of Christian faith.

- A. God's love for us, especially as shown on the cross. This love guarantees his faithfulness to us.
- B. God's promise of final deliverance from suffering and death. This promise is implicit in Jesus's resurrection, and inspires hope. Note that the final deliverance for which Paul waits includes all of creation (8:19-21). Paul believes that God will even redeem the ecology, and I think this vision has ethical implications. If God intends to redeem the natural world, then we as God's followers must treasure it.
- C. The transforming presence of Christ's Spirit in our individual and corporate lives. This presence persuades us that nothing will be able to separate us from Christ's love as we wait for final redemption (ch. 8).

VI. How justification by faith overcomes the bondage of law and sin.

- A. Just as Adam's sin led to sin and death for his descendants, Jesus's righteousness leads to righteousness and life for those who accept him. Through Jesus and the Spirit, righteousness is a spiritual power at work in history and delivers us from sin. Note that Jesus left the heavenly realm and entered the realm of history (e.g., Rom. 10:6). Hence, he (and only he)

is not conditioned by Adam's sin.

B. The preaching of Christ's death and resurrection reveals to us God's unimaginable love and forgiveness for us despite our sinfulness.

C. When we say "yes" to this love and receive baptism, we become reconciled to God and centered in him, and his Spirit dwells in us. Note that much of this power comes from our being present in a Christian community.

D. Consequently, our proud self-centeredness, which is the ultimate source and basis of sin, disappears.

E. The indwelling power of God begins to transform us and make us act righteously.

F. This new righteousness fulfills what the law demanded, especially as Jesus summarized that law in the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself (Rom. 13:8-10, cf. Mark 12:31).

G. However, we cannot boast of this righteousness, because it depends on being centered in God and results from first accepting his undeserved goodness towards us when we were sinful.

VII. Hence, Paul can claim there is only one salvation for Jews and Gentiles, and this salvation is apart from the law and yet fulfills it.

VIII. As Christians we live both in solidarity with the suffering world (J.C. Beker) and in joyful hope for the redemption of all things (Rom. 8).

A. As people who have the presence of Christ's Spirit within us, we look forward in hope to final salvation, because the Spirit is the down payment of that complete deliverance. This salvation is for all things because there is only one God.

B. Nevertheless, we still live in this broken world and share in its pain.

This sharing can be a basis for compassion and mission.

IX. Paul's vision of the omnipotence of God. A major theological problem is how Christians (or other monotheists) can claim that God is both good and all powerful when there is so much evil in the world. Why does God not intervene to eliminate wickedness and suffering? Paul's answer seems to be

A. In this fallen world we see God's omnipotence primarily in the fact that nothing can separate us from God's love.

B. At the final judgment God will crush all rebellion and produce the perfect world. Once he does so, however, there will no longer be any need for self-sacrifice and trust. Instead, we will be fully in possession of the final good or evil that is our due.

C. The reason that God has not yet used force to end the present broken world is that he wishes people to be able to choose such virtues as faith, hope, and love and through that choice become ready for the final judgment.

Discussion: Do you believe that God is good and powerful and yet there is real evil in the world? If so, how do you explain this paradox? If not, what do you believe?

Excursus: Some Implications of Paul's Theology for Dealing with Guilt and Growing Spiritually

- I. In recent centuries Western civilization has struggled with debilitating guilt feelings.
- II. We may define guilt feelings as self-condemnation for not living up to our personal standards. Note that guilt feelings differ profoundly from a sense of sin. The latter is a breakdown in our relationship with God because we have not responded to God's call.
- III. Many Christians (including me) have found relief from guilt feelings through reading Paul's letters, perhaps, especially, the letter to the Romans.
- IV. Strictly speaking, Paul is not greatly concerned with guilt feelings.
 - A. In the ancient world people suffered from shame more than guilt. "Shame" is a sense of worthlessness due to rejection by the community for not living up to its standards. Note that the New Testament emphasizes that Christians do not need to be ashamed of their faith (e.g., Rom. 1:16). The approval of God is more important than the disapproval of the world.
 - B. There is nothing in Paul's letters to suggest that he himself ever had deep guilt feelings. On the contrary, Paul seems to suffer from pride.
- V. Nevertheless, a clear implication of Paul's theology is that guilt feelings are not appropriate in Christian life.
 - A. Self-condemnation for not living up to our personal standards implies
 1. Our primary moral obligation is to follow the dictates of our own consciences
 2. We actually have the power to perform what our consciences require.
 3. We are responsible for judging ourselves as to whether we have fulfilled these requirements.
 - B. At each point, Paul would at least raise questions. He would contend
 1. Our primary obligation is to follow the leading of God in the power of the Spirit.
 2. Our own consciences are at least as subject to error as any other part of us. Note his complaint that some people's consciences are "weak" (e.g., 1 Cor. 8:10; cf. Rom. 14:1-15:6).
 3. Freedom to do good only comes from accepting the undeserved love of God. Hence, apart from God's grace, we seldom have the power to perform what our consciences require.
 4. God is the one who judges, and we should be cautious even about passing judgment on ourselves. God is gracious, and if we continue to condemn ourselves when God does not, we are rejecting God's forgiveness and setting ourselves up as God.
- VI. In my own mind at least, Paul's theology also raises questions about engaging in certain self-improvement projects.
 - A. Often as a response to guilt feelings, people come up with some self-improvement project (e.g., a new year's resolution to go on a diet).
 - B. Then on the basis of will power, they try to accomplish it.
 - C. From Paul's perspective such efforts are likely to fail because
 1. They are not based on God's empowering forgiveness and call.

2. If they did succeed, they would produce sinful pride.
- D. By contrast, Paul's theology suggests that in the spiritual life we should
 1. Always begin with trust in God's love and forgiveness.
 2. Discern where the Holy Spirit is currently transforming our lives.
 3. Follow the Spirit's leading.

Assignment: Reread Romans 3:21-8:39. Study Romans 9-16.

Introduction to Romans 9-16

I. The second half of Romans basically consists of two sections, each of which has its own introduction and conclusion:

- A. 9-11 which deals with God's plan and the Jews.
- B. 12:1-15:13 which gives practical exhortation.
- C. Note that 15:14-16:23 is an appendix which deals with Paul's personal plans and extends various greetings. (review) I think that 16:24 and 16:25-27, which are missing in some ancient copies of Romans, were not originally part of the letter. Today perhaps the most interesting feature of chapter 16 is the women it mentions.
 1. A third of the many names belong to women.
 2. The text suggests that women were playing prominent roles in church life and even leadership. For example, Phoebe (a "deacon") was the "patroness" of a congregation and probably the person who brought Paul's letter. Junia was an "apostle."

II. In these two sections I believe Paul is trying to win support from Jewish Christian readers and help unify the church by insisting that Gentile Christians must not feel superior to Jews. Note that the first half of Romans seeks to win support from Gentile Christians by arguing that Jews should not despise Gentiles.

- A. 1:17-8:39 addresses Jews (e.g., 2:17) and warns them not to be arrogant because there is only one salvation for all and it comes through faith.
- B. By contrast, 9:1-15:13 addresses Gentiles (e.g., 11:13) and tells them that they must not despise the Jews.
 1. The Jews have priority of a sort in salvation.
 - a. The Jews have the heritage from which Christianity came.
 - b. There has always been a faithful Jewish remnant in the church.
 - c. In the end, God will fulfill his ancient promises to Israel, and all Israel will be saved.

2. The strong (the Gentiles) should defer to the weak (the Jews) in everyday matters.

III. Nevertheless, 9:1-15:13 also continues the theological discussion of how the law can be both good and unnecessary or, if you like, of the relationship between Christian faith and Jewish law.

- A. 9-11 deals with the question of whether God will fulfill his ancient promises in the law to the Jews. Note that if these promises will not be fulfilled, the law is untrue.

B. 12:1-15:13 mostly deals with the problem of how Christians should live if they are not subject to Jewish law, and especially with how Gentiles should live with Jews who continue to observe the law.

Romans 9-11

Key quote: Romans 11:30-32: "Just as you [Gentiles] formerly yourselves disobeyed God but now have received mercy through their [the Jews'] disobedience, so they too now have been disobedient to the mercy you received so that they themselves might also now receive mercy. For God has imprisoned all in disobedience in order that he might grant mercy to all."

- I. Romans 9-11 has certainly been the least loved section of the Epistle.
- II. Accordingly, it is with trepidation that I insist it contains things that are profound and helpful.
- III. Let us begin with a summary of the literal contents. To make the substance of Paul's arguments clear, I will present them in a slightly different order than the epistle does.
 - A. Paul has deep sorrow because his fellow Jews mostly have not embraced Christ. They should have been the first to do so because of their heritage as God's people. Although we must assume that Paul is being sincere, he certainly realized that these sentiments would be attractive to his Jewish Christian readers.
 - B. Nevertheless, Paul insists, God has not failed.
 - 1. God accomplishes his purposes by choosing some people to follow him and hardening others.
 - 2. This election and hardening are not due to the worthiness of people but to the providential purposes of God. As the creator, God has the right to decide the roles of his creatures. (Here one might take issue with Paul, especially when Paul defends God's right to punish people for performing the evil roles he has assigned to them.)
 - C. At the present time God has
 - 1. Hardened most of the Jews.
 - 2. Brought faith to the Gentiles.
 - D. Spiritually, the present problem with the Jews is that they
 - 1. Are still trying to become righteous by following the law.
 - 2. Have not accepted the righteousness that Christian missionaries have been preaching, the righteousness that comes from the faithfulness of Jesus. Of course, earlier in the letter Paul has explained what this new righteousness is and why it is better.
 - E. Nevertheless, God has not forsaken the Jewish people, because he is always faithful to his promises, and he promised that the Jews would be his people forever.
 - F. At the present time there is a remnant of Christian Jews; Paul is an illustration.

G. By converting Gentiles Paul hopes to make at least some of his fellow Jews "jealous" (presumably when they see the superior righteousness of Christian Gentiles).

H. Such jealousy will humble the Jews and bring them to trust in God's forgiveness through Jesus.

I. Hence, God consigning Israel to sin was part of his providential plan to save the Jews through grace.

J. In the end God will take dramatic action, and all Israel will be saved.

K. At present, Gentile Christians have no basis to boast against the Jews.

1. Gentile Christianity is based on Judaism.
2. There have always been Jewish Christians.
3. We cannot blame Jews who reject Christianity because
 - a. Their lack of faith is not due to a moral defect but to God's choice. In their efforts to follow the law, the Jews even show a zeal for God (10:2).
 - b. Their "rejection" led to the gospel being preached to the Gentiles. Note that some early Christian missionaries concentrated on converting Gentiles after having little success converting Jews and got a more favorable reception from Gentiles once the latter realized that Christianity was not mainline Judaism. Gentiles had deep prejudices against Jews.
 - c. In the end God will have mercy on the Jews and save them all.

IV. Many Christians today who are concerned with Jewish-Christian dialog appeal to Romans 9-11 because of its insistence that the Jewish community has a continuing place in God's plan.

V. I also find several other implications of this section very helpful as we struggle with diversity in the church and elsewhere.

A. God has acted so no people has a privileged relationship with him and, therefore, no ethnic group can feel that it is inherently superior.

1. God has saved the Gentiles through the Jews, from whom we get the scriptures and the Christ.
2. Nevertheless, since the Jews have fallen away, they must receive God's saving message through the Gentiles.

B. We have a way for the different parts of the Church to value one another. It sometimes happens that the oldest and most established parts of the Church (e.g., European and North American Christianity) decline, whereas newer parts (e.g., Christianity in Africa and Asia) prosper. Paul's presentation in Romans 9-11 would suggest

1. One important reason that older Christian centers decline is
 - a. They confuse the Christian message with their own cultural identity and narrow perspectives and feel smug. To use Paul's terminology, they try to establish their own righteousness.
 - b. Hence, they no longer realize that our standing with God must come only from trust in the love and power that he has

revealed through Christ.

2. By contrast when a culture is first encountering Christianity, that culture finds it easier to accept the message that no one has a privileged position with God because of ethnic origin.

3. Nevertheless, these newer churches must not despise decadent older Christian centers, because it is these centers which preserved the faith.

4. The oldest and most established parts of the Church can turn to new Christian communities for inspiration and renewal.

Note: I believe similar dynamics occur in other contexts (e.g., classroom teaching). Enthusiasm and wonder are the gifts of the novice.

C. As Christians we can believe that salvation is only through Christ and yet not despise (or even worry about) others who do not believe in him.

1. Our own faith is not due to our virtue, but is God's gift.

2. God wishes to save everyone and has a plan for each person's life.

3. In the future God will perform some dramatic new act(s) to save those who presently do not believe. Note: These acts may be later in history or after an individual's death.

Appendix: Predestination in Romans

A. In chapters 9-11 and elsewhere Paul repeatedly emphasizes that God predetermines what human beings will do and yet also judges people on their actions.

B. These chapters have been a basis for the doctrine of divine predestination (i.e., that God predestines both what we will do in this life and whether we will go to heaven or hell).

C. Of course, this doctrine invites all sorts of objections, some of which Paul himself considers (e.g., How can God condemn us when he has made us the way we are?).

D. As we struggle with what Paul claims in 9-11, we should remember the following:

1. Paul probably is writing *ad hoc* and has not thought out his position carefully.

2. He emphasizes predestination to salvation and comes close to universal predestination to salvation. "God has imprisoned all in disobedience in order to have mercy on all! (11:32)"

3. Building on the observations of E.P. Sanders, we may note that in Paul, as in other biblical writers, predestination appears in a different context than free will.

a. Biblical writers emphasize our freedom to choose when they are issuing moral challenges.

b. They emphasize predestination when they discuss what God has done in history or when they are attacking people for taking credit for their own virtuous actions.

E. During Paul's lifetime the Christian faith in predestination was supported by unquestioned belief that the Old Testament (Hebrew

Scriptures) had prophesied the coming of Jesus in detail, whereas today critical scholars have concluded that this is not so.

F. Today we should also realize that God's omniscience does not require for the future to be fixed. If humans create the future by making free choices, God cannot know some of the future, since there is (presently) nothing to be known about what we will freely choose later

G. The relationship of freewill to determinism in human life is a continuing problem not only in Christianity or even religion as a whole but also in many other disciplines (e.g., history, psychology, philosophy).

Discussion: To what extent are we free as human beings to make our own choices and guide our own lives? To what extent are we controlled by other forces? Is God present in these other forces?

Assignment: Reread Romans 9-11; study Romans 12-15

Romans 12-15

Key quotes: Romans 12:17-18: "Do not return evil for evil to anyone, but take thought for the things that all people hold to be good. If possible, to the extent it depends on you, be at peace with all people."

Romans 14:13-15: "Therefore, let us no longer judge one another. Rather, make this resolution, not to put a stumbling block or an obstacle before a brother or sister. I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is inherently unclean, but for a person who considers it to be unclean, for them it is unclean. If your brother or sister is hurt by your food, you are no longer behaving lovingly. Do not by your food destroy a person for whom Christ died."

I. After Paul has completed his "theological" discussion in Romans 1-11, he gives practical advice in Romans 12-15. His advice especially concerns two issues:

- A. How Roman Christians should relate to the world
- B. How they can live together in harmony with one another.

II. The Roman church was especially in need of this advice because

- A. In the past the government had expelled Jewish Christians from Rome.
- B. When Paul was writing, the weak (i.e., Jewish Christians who believed that God required them to observe the Mosaic Law) were having difficulty living with the strong (Christians who did not observe the Mosaic Law).

III. These problems had resulted in part from the turbulent history of the church at Rome.

- A. The Roman church was founded very early (cf. Rom. 15:23).
- B. The coming of Christianity to Rome caused disturbances within the Jewish community and, as a result, around 49 C.E. the Emperor Claudius expelled many Jews (presumably including the Christian ones) from the city (Vita Claudii 25 & Acts 18:2).
- C. At some point (after the death of Claudius?) at least some of these Jewish Christians managed to return.

D. This departure and return must have strained relations between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

1. After the Jewish Christians were expelled, Gentile Christians probably made no effort to keep the ritual requirements of the Mosaic Law.
2. The Gentile Christians also assumed all the leadership roles in the remaining congregations.
3. When Jewish Christians returned to Rome after the death of Claudius, they cannot have been comfortable with how the church there had evolved in the interim.

IV. How Christians should relate to the Pagan world. According to Romans,

A. Christians should not conform to this world. Instead, God leads us to reject the evil and superficiality of society.

B. Nevertheless, Christians should

1. Strive to live in harmony and peace with outsiders.
2. Never return evil for evil.
3. Pay their taxes, revere civil authority, and be model citizens.

C. Excursus: A word about 13:1-7.

1. Taken at face value, this passage seems to advocate unquestioning obedience to civil authorities, since it proclaims that all authority is from God and to disobey a governmental authority is to disobey God himself.
2. Unfortunately, this text has sometimes been used to instill blind compliance to unethical regimes.
3. In fact, the passage was surely written *ad hoc* and should be seen primarily as a pastoral response to a particular situation rather than a universal demand for uncritical obedience to all governmental authority.
 - a. Previously, at least some Jewish Christians in Rome had gotten involved in civil disturbances (probably fights with other Jews).
 - b. These provocations had led to the wholesale expulsion of Jewish Christians from the capital and probably continuing suspicion from the imperial authorities.
 - c. It was essential for Christians not to provoke the civil authorities again.
 - d. In all probability, everyone in the congregation was fervently in agreement with Paul's remarks that people should obey the civil authorities. Indeed, when Paul wrote these words, he may have been aware that they would be popular.
 - e. 13:1-7 explicitly assumes that rulers are punishing the wicked and not the righteous. Note that the Roman government was unusually good during this period.
 - f. Consequently, the passage should not be used to justify obedience to evil leaders, especially since
 1. Earlier in the letter Paul blasted Pagan religion.

2. The Roman government officially supported Pagan religion.
3. Paul himself repeatedly suffered at the hands of Roman officials.
- g. Nevertheless, it seems to me that Romans 13:1-7 may be especially useful to us in the United States at the present time.
 - 1). America has developed an extreme and unhealthy suspicion of everything that the government and, especially, politicians say and do.
 - 2). Many people have become especially hostile to taxes and think that any sensible person (or good Christian!) would favor massive tax cuts, including for the rich.
 - 3). Hence, it may be that we need to learn again that politicians are often decent people who really want what is best for society, and that many governmental policies are genuinely helpful, and that taxes are necessary to pay for them.
 - 4). Above all, we need to learn that God can and does work through political systems, just as he can and does work through everything else.

Discussion

V. How Christians should relate to one another

- A. We should see ourselves as one body and use our differing individual gifts humbly.
- B. Our basic obligation to one another is to love. Such love fulfills the law.
- C. The section on the strong and the weak (14:1ff.). The “weak” are conservative Jewish Christians who feel that God requires them to keep the Mosaic Law in detail. A summary of the argument.
 1. When the strong and the weak observe different religious customs in regard to food or holidays, both groups act to honor God.
 2. Hence, the two groups should not judge each other. God is the only one who is in a position to judge, and he accepts both groups.
 3. The strong should not do anything that would cause the weak to act in a way that they think dishonors God. When we choose to do what we think dishonors God, we do dishonor him.
 4. Of course, in relating to one another, our primary concern must be the welfare of our Christian brothers and sisters.
 5. Accordingly, even though all things are indeed pure, Christians in practice are not always free to eat certain foods.
 6. We may note how differently Paul approaches division in community than we usually do in the church today.
 - a. We begin with the question of how we can be happier together.
 - b. Paul begins with the question of how we can honor God more totally. For Paul, everything is based on monotheism,

and condemning one another is sinful primarily because it usurps the prerogatives of God who alone is judge.

VI. Paul's theology points toward an unusual solution to the problem of how to unify diverse peoples.

- A. In history two solutions have been common
 - 1. Assimilation, i.e., forcing minorities to accept the culture and tradition of a dominant group.
 - 2. Pluralism within a supposed common humanity, i.e., affirming that the bond of a common human nature is enough to unify us and that, therefore, each people should be free to have its own heritage.
- B. In practice neither of these "solutions" has worked.
 - 1. Assimilation is a form of violence that deprives a minority of its heritage.
 - 2. As the continuing hatred in the world amply demonstrates, a common humanity is not enough to unify people.
- C. Paul's theology points to a different solution: pluralism within universal assimilation.
 - 1. Everyone must to some degree adopt a single historical culture and tradition (i.e., that of ancient Israel as it culminated in the coming of Jesus).
 - 2. Yet, because the Jews have fallen away, this tradition no longer is the special preserve of anyone.
 - 3. Of course, this common bond is strong enough that everyone (e.g., the weak and strong) can also observe their own customs.
- D. Note that the American solution of everyone agreeing on democracy and religious freedom is also a form of pluralism within universal assimilation. Most cultures in world history have not been democratic and have not believed in unlimited religious freedom. Democracy and religious freedom come from a particular cultural tradition.

VII. Reflection: Despite the failings of the Church, it has succeeded in unifying people from different ethnic and racial groups better than any other international organization, and it has done so precisely because it makes every group accept a cultural heritage which is alien.

- A. In the centuries immediately after Paul's life, Jewish Christianity died out.
- B. Today Jews who become Christians are indebted to Gentiles, since it was the latter who preserved the faith.
- C. Of course, Gentile Christians inherited the faith of Israel and remain indebted to Jews.
- D. Hence, in the church, Christianity is no one's birthright. We all must accept an alien cultural heritage.
- E. Perhaps because of this situation, the Church (especially the Roman Catholic community) is the largest international organization and, in my opinion, has been the most successful one in allowing different racial and ethnic groups to live together.
- F. We may also note that many of the Church's worst acts occurred when

the Church forgot Paul's perspective and identified Christianity with a particular culture (e.g., European) or nation (e.g., Catholic Spain).

Discussion: What do we have to agree on in order to accept genuine pluralism?

Assignment: Reread Romans 12-15; read Leviticus 18-20, Genesis 19:1-29, and Judges 19. Study Romans 1:16-3:20.

Paul and Homosexuality

Key quotes: Romans 1:22-27: "As they [Gentiles] claimed to be intelligent, God made them fools, and they exchanged the glory of the imperishable God for a copy of a perishable image of humankind, and birds, and quadrupeds and reptiles. Therefore, God gave them up through the lusts in their hearts to filth, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, they who exchanged God's truth for a lie and worshiped and served the creature instead of the Creator, who is to be blessed forever, amen. For this reason, God gave them up to disgraceful passions. Their females exchanged natural relations for the unnatural, and, similarly, the males also abandoned the natural relationship with the female and became inflamed in their desire for one another, males acting indecently with males and in return receiving in their own selves the necessary consequences of their deviation."

Romans 13:8-10: "You are obligated to do nothing for anyone, except to love one another, for loving fulfills the rest of the law. For the 'you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet,' and any other commandment is summarized in this saying, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to the neighbor; so love is the fulfillment of the law."

- I. In recent years there has been debate among Christians over whether homosexual acts are ethically acceptable and, if so, under what circumstances.
- II. Of course, in this debate the Bible has figured prominently, since the Bible is the historical foundation of Christianity.
- III. We must remember, however, that Christianity also is based on
 - A. Later Church tradition.
 - B. What seems reasonable today.
- IV. Consequently, merely because something is in the Bible does not mean that Christians necessarily accept it.
- V. In any Christian discussion of what the Bible teaches concerning homosexuality, the writings of Paul and his followers must play a central role.
 - A. The passages in the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament) concerning homosexuality are few and problematic.
 1. Only four texts probably refer to homosexuality: Leviticus 18:22, 20:13, Genesis 19:1-29, Judges 19.
 2. All these passages pose grave problems to the Christian interpreter.

a. Leviticus does not in general distinguish between what we would call taboo and ethics (note 18:19 versus 18:20-21).

Accordingly, it is unclear whether the prohibition of homosexual acts is relevant to Christians, since (thanks to Paul!) we do not hold Old Testament taboo (ritual) law to be valid today.

b. In the closely related stories of Lot and the men of Sodom and the outrage at Gibeah

1). It is not clear whether the sin the evil men intended included homosexual assault or was only the rejection of the sacred duty of hospitality. The key verb "know" can be taken sexually but does not have to be.

Commentators are divided. Perhaps the assumption underlying the texts is that homosexual assault is the ultimate violation of hospitality.

2). Even if homosexual assault is what is intended, all the stories condemn is homosexual rape. The stories do seem to regard homosexual rape as more serious than heterosexual, but a patriarchal society would naturally consider the violation of a man to be more serious than the violation of a woman. Moreover, as we noted above, all homosexual activity was contrary to sacred law.

3). These stories are part of the most primitive layer of Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures tradition and are in general ethically dubious. For example, no responsible person today could countenance how Lot or the Levite treat women, but the stories seem to.

B. Apart from the pauline writings, there are no clear references to homosexuality in the New Testament.

VI. There are three pauline passages that deal with homosexuality: Romans 1, especially, vss. 26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9, and 1 Timothy 1:10.

VII. In 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy there are condemnations of some sort of same-sex activity. Nevertheless, there are difficulties.

A. It is not clear whether or not these passages condemn monogamous sexual relations between consenting adults.

1. The references to homosexual activity are limited to single words in lists of vices.

2. The two terms Paul uses may refer to homosexual prostitutes, particularly to kidnapped boys sold into slavery (note 1 Tim. 1:10).

3. On the other hand, one of the terms may be derived from Leviticus and refer to any intercourse between males.

B. These passages do not give a rationale for their condemnations.

VIII. Accordingly, the issue of what the Bible has to say to Christians about homosexuality depends heavily on Romans 1, especially since this is the only passage in the Bible which mentions lesbianism.

- IX. In this passage Paul seems to be appealing to the Jews and expressing sentiments that they would appreciate. Note that in chapter 2 Paul will then emphasize that the Jews also are guilty before God.
- X. (review) The flow of the argument in Romans 1 is approximately as follows.
- A. Human beings had a natural knowledge of God but proudly chose to ignore him.
 - B. Consequently, they lost their understanding of God and began to worship idols.
 - C. God then gave them over to degrading sexual practices contrary to nature and over to various other vices.
 - D. Note that this argument basically appears elsewhere in Jewish writings (see Wisdom of Solomon 12-14) and reflects ancient Judaism's anti-homosexual position and condemnation of Gentile sexual practices.
- XI. Liberal commentators who are anxious to argue that the Bible does not condemn homosexuality have claimed the following:
- A. Paul is not here presenting his own viewpoint, but only that of his Jewish audience.
 - B. Paul had no knowledge of monogamous same-sex relationships between consenting adults. Instead, he was thinking of homosexual pederasty, which was widely practiced by upper class adult males who exploited slave boys.
 - C. Paul is not discussing homosexuals but heterosexuals who are choosing to commit homosexual acts, since the ancient world had no knowledge of sexual orientation.
 - D. Because Paul views homosexuality as a punishment for idolatry, if we disagree with him over whether idolatry is the cause of homosexuality, then we need not accept his condemnation of homosexuality either.
 - E. Paul assumes a patriarchal understanding of sexual roles, and if we reject that understanding we can reject the conclusions about homosexuality that Paul draws from it.
 - 1. The patriarchal culture Paul knew assumed
 - a. Men were inherently superior to women.
 - b. Part of that superiority was that male bodies were hard and penetrated soft female bodies.
 - c. Males who were sexually penetrated were effeminate and, therefore, weak and lacking in honor.
 - 2. If we reject this patriarchal bias, we can reject what Paul has to say about homosexuality.
 - F. Paul does not claim that homosexuality is sinful, only that it is disgusting (i.e., disgusting to Jews) [Countryman].
 - G. The Bible condemns homosexuality primarily because of the Israelite desire for more offspring, whereas today our problem is overpopulation.
- XII. In my opinion, there is at least a little something to be said for each of these positions, but on the whole they are unconvincing.
- A. Of course, Paul is presenting a traditional Jewish viewpoint which his Jewish audience would like. But it appears to be his own viewpoint too.

Moreover, nothing in the letter suggests that the Gentile Christians in the Roman congregation would have any problem with Paul's condemnation of Gentile homosexuality. Note: Pagan writers were divided over whether or not homosexuality was ethical. Hence, it is possible that even before their conversion to Christianity Paul's Gentile readers may not have approved of homosexuality. My own suspicion is that the lower classes from whom most Christian converts came were far less tolerant of homosexuality than the social elite.

B. Paul probably is thinking especially of homosexual pederasty, because it was widely practiced and discussed. Nevertheless, the passage never mentions minors. Instead, the passage refers both to lesbianism and homosexuality, both to desire and activity, and Paul seems to condemn homosexuality as a whole. Note too that Paul argues from "nature" (though he does not define this term).

C. Paul does indeed describe heterosexuals falling into homosexual desire and activity, but he seems to assume that such people have now become what we today mean by homosexuals (i.e., individuals whose primary sexual desire is for someone of the same gender rather than the opposite one).

D. It is an exaggeration to say that the ancient world knew nothing about sexual orientation. The ancients certainly knew that some people preferred having sex with their own gender.

E. Jewish culture, including Paul, would not have claimed that homosexuality was due to idolatry unless it had already decided that homosexuality was evil.

F. It is true that Paul's condemnation of homosexuality in part reflects the patriarchal values of ancient society, but it is striking that Paul begins by condemning lesbianism as "unnatural." Therefore, his primary objection to same-sex desire and activity is not primarily due to a patriarchal bias.

G. Of course, Paul views homosexuality as disgusting (and so as itself a punishment), but something can be both disgusting and sinful, and that is apparently how Paul views homosexuality. Note that he discusses homosexuality as one of the many vices that result from abandoning God.

H. It may well be that the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) condemns homosexuality out of a desire for more offspring, but Paul did not think that people needed to have children. He thought that the present world was about to end (cf. his discussion of marriage versus celibacy in 1 Cor. 7). Of course, in the new creation everyone would live forever, and there would be no need for new generations to replace the old.

XIII. Several things about Paul's larger theology of sin and grace are also relevant to the question of homosexuality and how to respond to it today. According to Paul,

A. Sin can be involuntary.

1. Sin for Paul is cosmic as well as personal (i.e., it includes the demonic and the corruption of nature).

2. It (in some sense) can be inherited. Note that we inherit the

results of Adam's sin.

3. Even when we will the good, we cannot necessarily do it.

B. Merely condemning sin will cause it to abound.

C. The beginning to overcoming sin is the acceptance of God's free forgiveness in Christ.

D. Sometimes God does not eliminate the brokenness due to evil but instead invites us to allow his strength to be made perfect in weakness.

Note how Paul dealt with his own "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7-12).

E. Theoretically, "all things are lawful" (1 Cor. 6:12, 10:23) for Christians;

indeed in Romans, Paul even insists that all things are clean (Rom. 14:14).

The only question is what is helpful, and this question must be answered in the light of particular people in particular situations.

F. Most especially, anything that expresses genuine love is in accordance with God's will (Rom. 13:8-10).

G. Our need to condemn someone else's behavior may be an indication that in some sense we are doing the same thing ourselves.

XIV. Discussion: What should we do today with Paul's teaching on homosexuality?

A. Should we accept it as fully valid?

B. Should we reject it as basically erroneous?

C. Should we accept certain elements of it as we attempt to produce a more helpful perspective in the light of our contemporary scientific knowledge and social experience? If so, what would that perspective be, and what perspectives from Paul would it incorporate?

D. Note, there are at least five possible ethical views on homosexuality.

1. It is sinful (as, for example, adultery is). But note that with adultery there is an injured party, whereas in consenting same-sex relationships there is not.

2. It is a disability that can be accommodated (as, for example, deafness is). Here we must ask why is homosexuality a disability.

One possible answer is that sex works better when sexual organs are complementary.

3. It is a meaningless variation (as, for example, red hair is).

4. It is a "lesser good" (i.e., it is good to have sexual love for your own gender but better to have sexual love for the opposite gender).

5. It is a meaningful variation, i.e., homosexuals have special gifts and perspectives which, if honored and accepted, contribute to the wholeness of the human community. Of course, if we hold this position, we should attempt to identify what these gifts and perspectives are. One possibility is that homosexuality and lesbianism undermine patriarchy.

6. Homosexuality is a disability that can become a gift if it is accepted and offered up (as Helen Keller's blindness and deafness were).

Discussion: Which view do you hold, and how would you deal with homosexuality and Paul's theology?

Assignment: Read Philippians.

Philippians: The Unity, Situation, and Purpose of the Letter; How to Find Joy in the Midst of Tribulation

Key quotes: Philippians 3:1-3a: "Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. To write to you the same things is not bothersome to me, and it is safe for you. Watch out for the dogs! Watch out for the evil workers! Watch out for the mutilation! For we are the circumcision, who serve in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus . . . "

Philippians 1:18-21: "And I will rejoice, for I know that this will lead to salvation through your prayers and the support of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, in accordance with my eager expectation and hope that in no way will I be put to shame, but in all boldness as always so now Christ will be exalted through my body, whether through life, whether through death. For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain."

Philippians 2:25-26: "I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier and your messenger and minister for my need, since he is longing for all of you and is distressed because you heard that he was sick."

I. Despite its brevity, St. Paul's letter to the Philippians has been one of the most influential and beloved books in the New Testament.

A. It had a major impact on the formulation and defense of orthodox Christology, because of the "Christ Hymn" (Phil. 2:6-11). Few passages in the New Testament anticipate later orthodox dogma so fully.

B. Its bubbling joy and love have always made the letter attractive and quotable ("Rejoice in the Lord always; I will say it again, 'Rejoice'" [4:4]; "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" [4:13], etc.).

II. Unfortunately, before going on we must deal with the issue of the "integrity" (original unity) of the letter. Radical critics have argued that the canonical letter consists of fragments of two or even three different letters which an editor stitched together after Paul's death. According to such critics, only such a hypothesis can explain

A. Why at 3:1 and 4:8 Paul seems to be concluding the letter (note: "finally"), even though he subsequently continues on at some length.

B. The sudden shift in mood and topic in 3:2.

C. And the fact that in the canonical letter Paul delays thanking the Philippians for their gift until 4:10.

D. Why in the second century Polycarp refers to Paul's "letters" to the Philippians (Polycarp, Phil. 3:2).

III. In my opinion there is nothing to be said for the hypothesis that an editor composed Philippians from originally independent letters.

A. There is no plausible reason why an editor would have wished to do

such a thing.

B. The Greek words (*to loipon*) which sometimes mean “finally” have other meanings (“in addition,” “in summary”).

C. In fact there is no shift in mood in 3:2. Rather there is an increase in the warnings that Paul has been carefully orchestrating since the beginning of the letter and will increase later (note 1:15-18, 1:28, 2:20-21, 3:18-19).

D. Nothing about the original unity of the letter can be concluded from Paul postponing the thanksgiving until the end of the letter.

1. Paul clearly alludes to the gift earlier in 2:25, and in 1:3-7 there seems to be a deliberate sustained ambiguity (e.g., Paul talks about “every remembrance of you”; is he saying my remembrance of you or your remembrance of me or both?).

2. Rhetorically, Paul wanted to distance his grateful acknowledgment that the Philippians sent him money from his charge that competing missionaries seek selfish gain (3:18-19). Note Paul’s insistence in 4:10-18 that he does not need or seek gifts.

E. The fact that the letter sounds like it is ending in 3:1 causes the reader (esp., the listener) not to compare the new section closely with what went before and allows Paul to emphasize both the theme that all is well and the Philippians should rejoice and the theme that the opponents (“dogs”) are a serious threat. Hence, the digression is rhetorically effective and, I suspect, deliberate.

F. There is great continuity of themes throughout the letter. Note the pervasiveness of joy, opposition, and the need for unity and humility.

G. There are even extensive parallels in wording throughout the letter. Note how Paul applies words from the Christ hymn (2:6-11) to the description of his own life (3:4-11) and the final goal of the Philippians (3:20-21). These parallels, incidentally, suggest that Paul composed the hymn and is not quoting, as some scholars have claimed.

H. Polycarp could have deduced the existence of other letters from 3:1 and 3:18 (Kummel). Of course, there could have been other now lost letters from Paul to the Philippians, or Polycarp could simply have been mistaken.

IV. Although we cannot be sure where and when Paul wrote Philippians, the traditional claim that he produced it in Rome toward the end of his life is, in my opinion, more likely than the revisionist proposal that he wrote it at Ephesus earlier.

A. Revisionist scholars have argued

1. There is a constant stream of past and future communication (esp., 2:25-27). For example,

- a. The Philippians received news that Paul was in prison, and they sent money by Epaphroditus.

- b. Epaphroditus became seriously ill, and news of this reached Philippi, and they became worried.

- c. News reached Epaphroditus that the Philippians were worried about him.

- d. Epaphroditus recovered and now wants to reassure the

Philippians that he is well.

2. This constant communication implies that Paul is close to Philippi.
3. Ephesus is relatively close to Philippi, and we know from Acts (e.g., 19:10) that Paul spent an extended period there, whereas Rome is distant.
4. 2 Corinthians 6:5, 11:23 make it clear that Paul had frequently been in prison, and we may suppose that one of these imprisonments was in Ephesus.
5. We know from Romans that Paul planned to go to Spain after visiting Rome (Rom. 15:24, 28), whereas in Philippians Paul states that he intends to visit them (1:26, 2:24).

B. In my (and lots of people's) opinion, there arguments are weak and other considerations strongly suggest Rome.

1. The stream of communication need not have been so great. For example,
 - a. There is no reason to assume that the Philippians heard that Paul was in prison before they sent him money, especially since they had sent money before (4:16).
 - b. Nor any reason to assume that Epaphroditus had *heard* they there were worried about his illness. (Of course, he knew that the news that he was sick would make them worry, and there is no reason to assume that the news had even already arrived, only that it would arrive before the letter.)
2. Since, according to Acts 28:30, Paul was in custody in Rome for more than two years, there was ample time for a lot of communication.
3. The stream of communication does suggest that Paul has been in prison for a considerable period, and if there had been a long imprisonment in Ephesus, Acts should have mentioned it.
4. It would be natural after a prolonged imprisonment for Paul to revisit his old congregations before going on to new missionary fields.
5. The fact that there are now "bishops and deacons" (1:1) suggests that Philippians is late.
6. The references to the Praetorian Guard (1:13) and Caesar's household (4:22) work very well for Rome and very poorly for Ephesus (which was in a Senatorial province; Fee). Note the emperor's "household" included at least much of the government bureaucracy.
7. The fact that Paul (in a letter to instill joy!) must repeatedly mention that he may be executed (1:20-24, 2:17) strongly suggests that his legal appeals are exhausted and that he is, therefore, before the Emperor's tribunal.

V. The primary significance of what we have seen so far is that Philippians is probably a very late letter and, therefore, gives us his mature reflections. Hence, we will have to spend a fair amount of time on the letter despite its brevity.

VI. The letter responds to a depressing situation.

A. In Philippi the congregation is

1. Having to deal with distressing news.

a. Epaphroditus, who was taking money to Paul, got sick and nearly died.

b. Paul is (still) in prison, facing trial, and the possibility of execution. Note: In the Roman world, the government did not normally provide food or other necessities for prisoners. It was up to family and friends to attend to an inmate's needs. Consequently, the Philippians are probably worried that Paul is suffering severe deprivation.

2. Divided because of competition between two powerful women (esp., 4:2). Note that here we have a hint of women being church leaders.

3. Facing hostility from its Pagan environment. The fact that Philippi was a Roman colony in Greece made its loyalty to the worship of the emperor particularly strong.

B. Paul's situation

1. He is in prison and cannot come now and must, therefore, send a letter.

2. He is sending Epaphroditus back (probably with the letter) and needs to commend him.

3. He needs to announce the later visit of Timothy.

4. He is beset with Christian opponents (surely Judaizers) who are taking advantage of his imprisonment, and he fears that similar figures will arrive in Philippi and disturb the congregation (3:2-3).

VII. The dominant theme in Philippians is joy. Specifically, Paul keeps insisting

A. That he himself is joyful (1:4 and often).

B. The Philippians can and must rejoice too (e.g., 4:4).

VIII. Of course, this theme is a pastoral response to the depressing situation, and we may wonder whether Paul is as joyful as he claims.

IX. Nevertheless, we should assume the general sincerity of the letter and examine why Paul thinks that joy is possible under such dire circumstances.

X. Before discussing why Paul insists that joy is possible under dire circumstances, we might reflect for a moment on the popular American notion of what joy is and how we can get it.

A. In the contemporary American culture, joy seems to be primarily a subjective mood. We "feel" joyful.

B. This mood is an individual matter.

C. Joy normally comes from one of three things:

1. My life happens to be going well right now, and/or the expected future looks bright.

2. I have psyched myself up by "the power of positive thinking."

3. I just happen to feel good.

XI. Americans also act as if we can spend as much time as we like thinking about violence, dehumanized sex, and every other form of evil without such thought having any profound effect on our sense of well-being. Note what is on the television.

XII. By contrast, for Paul joy is primarily an attitude. Throughout Philippians Paul keeps using a Greek verb (*froneo*) which means “setting one’s mind on.”

XIII. Joy primarily comes from faith in the triumph of Christ. Note that Paul calls Jesus both “Lord” and “Savior.”

A. Christ is already Lord of the universe, thanks to his resurrection (e.g., 2:9-11).

B. Through the Spirit he supports us in this present life (1:19; note: “to live is Christ” [1:21]).

C. At death, we go to him. Paul stresses that he would prefer to depart and be with Christ (1:21-23).

D. In due course, Christ will return and save the faithful and transform the world (e.g., 3:20-21).

XIV. Because of the Lordship of Christ, Paul can rejoice even in the face of the most radical possible uncertainty about his immediate future, because, whatever happens, Christ will be there. “To live is Christ; to die is gain” (1:21). Note that Paul does not have to be in control of what happens but feels free to leave the future open.

XV. Because of the Lordship of Christ, Paul can forget about the mistakes of the past (3:13). Please remember how serious these mistakes were: Paul had persecuted the church! The sins of the past can be forgotten, especially because of

A. The forgiveness of God.

B. Salvation does not consist in establishing our own righteousness, but in
1. Surrendering to the loving call of Jesus who has already made us his own

2. Becoming united with him (3:9).

XVI. For Paul joy is also communal.

A. He rejoices in the good things that are happening at Philippi.

B. He invites the Philippians to share his own joy.

C. He reminds them that they will boast of one another at the last judgment (e.g., 1:26).

XVII. Paul can rejoice and be sorrowful at the same time.

A. In this letter he mentions having sorrow upon sorrow (2:27) and expresses anxiety about how the Philippians are doing.

B. But he feels that there can be joy in the midst of sorrow. Note 2 Corinthians 6:10, and note Paul’s emphasis on the “peace of Christ which surpasses understanding” (Phil 4:7).

C. I suspect that Paul would have insisted that sorrowful joy is itself the result of the presence of God’s Spirit in a broken world.

XVIII. There are several things that we must do in order to have joy in the midst of sorrow and evil. Note that in Philippians “joy” is primarily a verb; it is something we do.

A. We must think about good things (esp., Phil. 4:8-9). It is significant that Paul includes among these things whatever is beautiful in this fallen world. We are not called to ignore the positive aspects of our culture. One way to help ourselves think about good things is to thank God for them (cf. Phil 4:6).

B. We must make our needs known to God in prayer and continue to believe that God can and will supply what we require.

C. We must remember that the "Lord is near" (4:5) Here "near" means both constantly close to us and soon to return in glory.

D. We must also remember that "our commonwealth is in heaven" (3:20). One important implication is that we do not need to feel that we belong in this world or that worldly achievement matters. Paul insists that he reckons all worldly status as "excrement" (3:8).

E. We should remember that our needs, if honestly offered up to members of the community, can provide an opportunity for others to exercise their ministries and not only help us but also glorify God (cf. 4:17).

F. We should remember that (many of) our sufferings are for Christ, and our steadfastness in following Jesus despite difficulty brings great joy to God (cf. 4:18).

G. We must also remember that God has the power to keep us steadfast if only we rely on him.

XIX. I personally am particularly impressed by an implication of 3:15: We must not morbidly seek to discover what our sins are; instead, we are to wait in trust for God to reveal them to us when we are ready to deal with them.

Discussion: What do you think of Paul's claim that we can have joy under dire circumstances? Is there anything in what Paul says in Philippians that a non-Christian could accept?

(time permitting) Pictures of ancient Philippi.

Assignment: Reread Philippians.

Philippians and the Problem of Paul's Christology; One Solution

Key quotes: 1 Corinthians 3:21-23: "Let no one boast in human beings; for all things are yours, whether Paul, whether Apollos, whether Cephas [Peter], whether the world, whether life, whether death, whether what is, whether what is to come, all things are yours, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God."

1 Corinthians 15:28: "When all things have been made subject to him [Christ], then the Son himself will be made subject to the One who made all things subject to him, so that God may be all in all."

Philippians 2:5-11: "Have this way of thinking among yourselves, which you also have in Christ Jesus. He was in the form of God and did not consider it to be robbery [this word is variously translated] to be equal with God, but he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of human beings,

and being found in outward appearance as a human being, he humbled himself becoming obedient until death, even the death of the cross. Therefore, God also has highly exalted him and granted to him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee would bow, of things in heaven and on earth and underneath the earth, and every tongue proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father."

I. "Christology" is the branch of theology that deals with who is Jesus and how he saves us.

II. Both in ancient and modern times there has been vigorous debate over Paul's Christology, especially over whether Paul believed in the divinity of Christ.

A. In ancient times both the Orthodox (who believed that Christ was divine) and the Arians (who denied that Christ was divine) quoted Paul.

B. In modern times scholars vigorously have disagreed over whether Paul thought that Christ was divine and became incarnate.

III. The debate arises in large part because different passages in his letters seem to teach different things.

A. Thus, in 1 Corinthians Paul repeatedly presents Christ as fully subordinate to the Father.

1. We have hierarchies (e.g., God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of man, man is the head of woman; 11:3).

2. Paul insists that Jesus's cosmic lordship following the resurrection is only temporary and that ultimately Jesus will be subject to the Father (15:27-28).

B. By contrast in other passages, Paul clearly assumes that Jesus is divine. For example,

1. In Romans 9:5 the most natural way to read the Greek is that Jesus is "God over all."

2. Especially, in Philippians 2:6-11 we seem to have a clear statement of Christian orthodoxy (i.e., before the incarnation Christ dwelt with the Father and was equal to him, he then became incarnate and suffered while still retaining the divine nature, and then he returned to the full dignity of rule over the entire universe).

IV. Some scholars have tried to solve the problem of Paul's Christology by arguing that each of the places where Paul seems to teach the incarnation or the divinity of Christ either does not in fact say this or else does not reflect what Paul meant (e.g., such scholars translate Romans 9:5: "The Christ according to the flesh. God who is over all be blessed forever. Amen.")

V. In the case of Philippians 2:6-11, some scholars (e.g., Dunn) have insisted that the hymn does not teach the pre-existence and incarnation of Christ but instead simply compares Jesus to Adam, as Paul does elsewhere (e.g., Romans 5:12-14).

A. Adam in Genesis 1-3 was in the image of God and was tempted to become like God by knowing "good and evil."

B. Jesus in Philippians 2:6-11 was in the "form" of God and did not snatch at equality with God but instead chose obedience unto death.

VI. In my (and many scholars') opinion, such efforts to deny that Paul believed in

the incarnation and the divinity of Christ simply fail.

A. We may note, for example, that in Romans 9:5 all ancient translations have Paul declare that Jesus is “God” (Metzger).

B. In my opinion there is simply no justification for denying that Paul teaches the incarnation in Philippians 2:6-7. We may especially note

1. “Form” (*morphe*) is a different Greek word from “image” (*eikon*), the word that the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures) uses for Adam’s likeness to God.
2. Although the meaning of these terms does overlap, they are not synonyms.

a. The basic meaning of *morphe* is something’s outward shape (that in turn helps make it what it is).

b. The basic meaning of *eikon* is a copy or reproduction (Adam was a copy of God).

3. Grammatically Philippians 2:6 clearly indicates that Jesus was in the form of God and then subsequently “emptied himself” and was born in human likeness. Of course, Adam did not exist before his creation as a human being.

VII. In my opinion, to solve the problem of Paul’s Christology we need to answer two questions.

A. Why does Paul seem to teach different Christologies in different passages?

B. How did Paul come up with the idea of the divinity of Christ and of the incarnation? I believe that the primary reason some scholars insist that Paul could not have believed such things is that they cannot imagine how these ideas originated.

1. It is most unlikely that a former Pharisee drew on Pagan mythology.

2. Jewish monotheism militates against the ideas that God could become human or that a human being could become divine.

3. Hence, Paul did not get these ideas from elsewhere, and, therefore, if he had them at all, they must have come out of his own experience.

4. But how can we get at Paul’s experience?

VIII. The primary reason why Paul seems to say different things about Christology in different places is that his letters are pastoral, not systematic.

A. Paul wrote his letters to get his readers to make specific changes in behavior and attitude.

B. To inspire these changes, he presented Christ as a model of the intended changes.

C. Hence, the portrait of Jesus differs from one letter to another. Note, for example, that in 1 Corinthians

1. Paul is attempting to restore order in a congregation in chaos.

2. To restore order, Paul presents a series of hierarchies that the Corinthians should respect and tells the Corinthians to be obedient.

3. Hence, Paul presents Christ as taking his due place in hierarchies

(superior to us, of course, but inferior and obedient to the Father). Thus, Paul insists that although Christ now reigns over the universe he will at the consummation be subject to the Father.

IX. Since we are concentrating on Philippians, we may note that the Christ Hymn is also primarily pastoral.

- A. In Philippi two powerful women were competing for dominance, and this discord was disturbing the community as a whole (4:2).
- B. In addition, Paul was afraid that Judaizers would tempt the Philippians to seek the prestige and security of circumcision (3:2-3). Note that by being circumcised that the Philippians would have the
 - 1. Psychological advantage of following the letter of the Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures.
 - 2. Political advantage of belonging to a recognized and legal religion.
- C. Consequently, Paul argues that God calls Christians to humble themselves, and that if we humble ourselves, God will exalt us.
- D. In 3:7-11, Paul uses himself as an example of humbling himself in order to be exalted.
 - 1. He insists that he had all the privileges of being Jewish (“circumcised on the eighth day . . .”)
 - 2. He now counts them as excrement because of the supreme value of knowing Jesus.
 - 3. He wishes to be conformed to Christ’s sufferings so that in turn he may share in Christ’s resurrection.
- E. He explicitly urges the Philippians to be of the same mind as he is (3:15).
- F. We can now see why the Christ Hymn so forcefully emphasizes the supreme privileges that Christ had before the incarnation (equality with God!), the total and voluntary renunciation of these privileges (even to death on the cross), and the consequent total exaltation of Christ (so that all things in the universe acknowledge his lordship). Christ’s willing self-abasement and subsequent exaltation model the behavior that Paul wishes the Philippians to adopt (2:5). Note that there are extensive verbal parallels between the Christ hymn, Paul’s presentation of his own life, and his exhortations to the Philippians (2:5-11, 3:2-16, 3:17-21). These incidentally suggest that Paul himself composed the hymn and is not simply quoting an earlier composition.

X. Precisely because Paul tailors his presentation of Jesus to fit pastoral needs, it has recently become clear that in fact Paul did believe that Christ was divine, as we can see from 1 Corinthians.

- A. As we noted above, 1 Corinthians emphasizes the subordination of Jesus in order to justify the subordination of the Corinthians to Paul.
- B. Therefore, it is all the more striking that in 1 Corinthians 8:6
 - 1. Paul stresses that Jesus is the one “through whom all things” exist.
 - 2. Modifies the *Shema* to include Jesus.
 - a. Note that the *Shema*, “The LORD our God is One,”

proclaims monotheism and is the central theological statement of Judaism.

b. In 1 Corinthians 8:6 Paul divides the *Shema* between the Father and Jesus (“one God, the Father,” and “one Lord, Jesus Christ”!

3. And Paul does not even feel the need to justify this change. Apparently, the Corinthians already believed that Christ was divine thanks to Paul’s (and other missionaries’?) preaching.
4. Such evidence has led recent scholarship to conclude that Paul did believe in the divinity of Christ.

X. Regardless of its pastoral goals, the Christ Hymn in Philippians demonstrates that Paul believed

- A. Prior to his birth Christ existed in the “form” (i.e., in the nature and circumstances) of God.
- B. That he voluntarily renounced the privileges of divinity, but, significantly not the divine nature itself, and became incarnate. Note that Paul stresses that Jesus took the “form” of a slave, was born in the “likeness” of human beings, and was in “outward appearance” human.
- C. Because of his obedience to “death on a cross,” God exalted him, and the entire universe will acknowledge his lordship. Through the cross Jesus definitively revealed God, and ultimately the whole cosmos will confess this (N.T. Wright). Of course, Paul’s own missionary work was part of God’s plan to make the cosmos confess Jesus.

XII. Nevertheless, we must struggle with the question of where this thought came from.

XIII. The Christ Hymn along with the rest of the letter suggests two sources.

- A. The resurrection experiences. Note
 1. The hymn itself stresses that it is only with the exaltation of Christ (following the resurrection) that the universe acknowledges him.
 2. Paul himself had a resurrection experience and had talked to others who had one. Of course, Paul’s own encounter with the risen Christ led to his conversion.
- B. Paul’s experience of sharing in the sufferings of Jesus. Note that the Hymn stresses Jesus’s obedience to death on the cross, and elsewhere in the letter Paul talks about knowing Christ by becoming conformed to his sufferings (3:10-11).

XIV. Hence, we must make an effort to plumb these experiences.

XV. In analyzing the accounts of the resurrection appearances, we must remember that they are surely translations into human terms of experiences that could not be described literally. Note:

- A. Human language is based on normal experience.
- B. To describe utterly extraordinary or unique experiences, we must resort to metaphors.
- C. The written accounts of the resurrection appearances conflict with one another in details, and these conflicts are, at least in part, due to the use of differing metaphors to attempt to capture otherwise indescribable events.

XVI. As Perry has argued, the resurrection appearances in the New Testament tend to have a common structure.

- A. At first there is a compelling presence that initially can be misunderstood.
- B. Then it becomes clear beyond all doubt that Jesus himself is present.
- C. Jesus then issues a command to share the good news.
- D. With this command he gives a promise that he will somehow confirm the proclamation.

XVII. In a study of Paul, we may note that this same pattern appears in Luke's accounts of Paul's encounter with the risen Christ (Acts 9:3-9, 22:6-11, Acts 26:12-18). (Unfortunately, in his letters Paul does not attempt to describe his own resurrection experience beyond saying that he "saw" Christ [1 Cor. 9:1].)

XVIII. Consequently, we should conclude that this basic structure was part of the resurrection appearances.

XIX. The New Testament also links the resurrection appearances to the gift of God's Spirit who subsequently transformed the recipients.

XX. Note that Paul seems to do the same. The risen Lord he encountered was a "life-giving Spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45).

XXI. We must now investigate the complex question of whether these experiences included the experience of the risen Jesus being God.

XXII. We may begin our investigation by noting that the resurrection experiences have powerful parallels to the experience of God in the Hebrew Scriptures/Old Testament.

- A. The same structure of mysterious presence, recognition, command, and promise appears in the primordial appearance of God to Moses at the burning bush (Exod 3:1-12).
- B. In the Old Testament, it is God who gives the Spirit. "Only God can send God" (Gelpi).

XXIII. We must now turn to the large issue of what the human experience of God basically is, especially within the Christian tradition. I believe that it is the failure to ask this question that has doomed efforts to determine why Paul concluded that Christ is divine.

XXIV. The experience of God differs from other experiences primarily because it lacks limits and yet is personal.

- A. Other things and, especially, other personal beings have clear limits both in time and space, and we experience those limits. A person is always in a particular time and place.
- B. Aside from God, our experiences of limitlessness are vague and incoherent and often, I fear, are symptoms of mental breakdown.
- C. By contrast, when we experience God
 - 1. There are no limits in time and space. God is
 - a. Everywhere
 - b. Always
 - 2. He is personal and loving. Note that this love is noetic. God knows us fully.
 - 3. Part of the divine limitlessness is that everything else that we

experience does not exhaust God. He also extends beyond all times and places.

4. The sense of limitlessness is especially significant with respect to our experience of ourselves.

a. We experience God within us.

b. Yet, we experience God as somehow other.

5. Because God extends beyond us, he calls us to grow.

6. As we grow, we become conformed to him without losing our uniqueness. Note that we cannot be profoundly conformed to something limited (e.g., another person) without losing our identity.

XXV. The divine limitlessness clearly is part of the experience of God as recorded in the Old Testament. Note, e.g., the “I am,” of Exodus 3:14.

XXVI. The experience of divine limitlessness supports the fundamental doctrines that

A. All things exist in God

B. Yet God himself is transcendent.

C. We must become like God, though, of course, we cannot become God strictly speaking.

XXVII. These doctrines already appear in the Hebrew Scriptures/Old Testament.

A. God created the universe and sustains it.

B. Yet he is beyond it.

C. We must be holy because God is holy.

D. Yet, we can never become God strictly speaking. He is “spirit,” whereas we are “flesh.”

XXVIII. I would argue that Paul’s encounter with the risen Christ at least included an experience of a loving limitlessness who calls us to grow. Note, once again the pattern of mysterious presence, recognition, command, and promise.

XXIX. As Philippians itself emphasizes, Paul spent his subsequent life dwelling in Christ’s Spirit and being increasingly conformed to Christ. Paul writes that for him “to live is Christ” (1:21), and that he is seeking to be conformed to the sufferings of Christ with the ultimate hope of being conformed to his risen likeness (3:10-11).

XXX. Of course, Paul also held that through Christ we come to know the Father.

XXXI. Hence, it was inevitable that Paul would conclude that the risen Christ was divine.

XXXII. But if Christ was divine, he must have always been so, because no one can share fully in the limitlessness of God. We cannot become God.

XXXIII. Consequently, Christ must have existed before his human birth and always enjoyed the divine nature.

(time permitting) Some Comments on Paul’s Personality

I. We have now concluded our study of the letters that everyone agrees Paul actually wrote, and we have also read the Acts of the Apostles.

II. These are the only important sources of information that we have about Paul.

- III. (review) These documents are contingent pastoral responses to specific situations.
- IV. Nevertheless, from them we can reconstruct most of Paul's biography and continuing ideas.
- V. We can also make some observations about his personality.
- Discussion: What sort of person do you think Paul was?
- VI. My own opinion.
- A. Paul had certain striking features that persisted throughout his life.
 - 1. Pride. Note his tendency to dwell on his virtues and accomplishments and also his continual warnings about the dangers of pride.
 - 2. Fanaticism. Note his endless energy, willingness to suffer, and his conviction that he was saving the world.
 - 3. Intellectual brilliance.
 - 4. Devotion to God.
 - B. In his pre-Christian life, these characteristics caused him to persecute the church.
 - C. In his Christian life, the experience of God's overwhelming love shown through Jesus and present in the Spirit transfigured all of these traits. Consequently,
 - 1. Paul remained proud, but his pride was in what Christ had done for him (note his insistence on boasting in the cross) and in what Christ was accomplishing through him. Paul would insist that in and of himself he was nothing.
 - 2. Paul remained fanatical, but his fanaticism was no longer for the "law," but for faith, hope, and love. As we have seen, Paul could be very flexible about most things and invite others to be flexible. Note his ability to live like a Jew or a Gentile in response to the needs of the people he was serving.
 - 3. Paul remained one of the great minds in human history, but he realized the limitations of mere thought. He insisted that the wisdom of this world could be folly and that even Christians understand God only partially. Instead, in this present life we come closest to knowing God through trusting love rather than thought.
 - 4. Paul remained devoted to God, but it was the God who was revealed in Jesus, the God who desired to save everyone and who loved the world so much that he sent his Son to die for it. The Christian Paul usually had deep love for other people.

Introduction to the Remainder of the Pauline Letters--The Problem of Authorship

- I. Traditionally, the church has attributed fourteen letters to Paul. Note that seven along with its multiples is a sacred number in scripture.
- II. There is, however, no reason to assume that Paul wrote Hebrews.
 - A. Hebrews does not claim to be by Paul.

- B. Its literary style and theological content are very different from those of Paul's letters.
 - C. Even before the rise of modern, critical scholarship, some important Christian thinkers attributed Hebrews to other figures (Barnabas, Apollos).
 - D. The attribution of Hebrews to Paul may have been necessary to ensure its place in the New Testament.
 - E. Consequently, modern scholars agree that Paul did not write it.
- III. There is scholarly debate over whether Paul wrote six letters which bear his name: Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, Ephesians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus. I have listed these from the ones which it is most likely Paul wrote to the least, though some scholars argue that Paul could have written 2 Timothy and not written 1 Timothy.
- IV. There are at least four important reasons why many scholars question whether Paul wrote these.
- A. Differences in literary style from the letters that we know Paul wrote. Note, for example, the very long sentences in Colossians and Ephesians.
 - B. Differences in thought. Note, for example, the lack of stress on the cross, resurrection, and the Spirit in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus.
 - C. Differences in social situation. Note the highly developed church structure presupposed in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus.
 - D. What appears to be literary dependence on the letters we know Paul wrote. We have already observed this in the case of 2 Thessalonians.
- V. Of course, as we have seen, one way of explaining these differences is to postulate that Paul had a secretary draw up letters for him. I believe a secretary wrote 2 Thessalonians in accordance with Paul's directions and then Paul read and signed it.
- VI. The use of a secretary, however, cannot explain differences which indicate that certain letters were written after Paul's lifetime. Note that sometimes the vocabulary or the organization of the church fits the end (rather than the middle) of the first century.
- VII. In ancient Jewish and Christian tradition it was common to publish documents under the name of a dead saint. The technical name for this practice is "pseudonymity" (Greek: "false name").
- VIII. Naturally, on occasion, publishing a document under someone else's name may have been an attempt to deceive the reader and be what we would call forgery, and we have ancient accusations of forgery.
- IX. Since pseudonymity was widespread and occurs in many documents that have a strong ethical element, it appears that it was sometimes reputable.
- X. In the ancient world, like the modern, when we write something under the name of a dead saint, we make the claim that we are saying what that person would have said. (Cf. when "President George Washington" writes to the newspaper about current events.) Naturally, when we make that claim, we also claim the authority of this person.
- XI. In the ancient world, people did not use such devices as footnotes, bibliographies, and quotation marks to distinguish a writer's own contribution from that of their sources. Consequently, in a way it may have seemed more honest to write under someone else's name if one was passing on their ideas.

XII. In addition, in the ancient world people were not taught to become individuals but instead to become like the teacher.

A. Individualism was not a goal in ancient times.

B. Instead, the goal was to fit a social ideal.

C. Ideally, your teacher--especially, the person who taught you religion or philosophy--was the model you imitated. Note that you not only learned the teacher's ideas but also the character and even the lifestyle.

D. Of course, Paul taught in this way (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:1).

E. Note too, that when Paul was alive, there probably were no written documents which spelled out what a Christian believed or did. One learned about Christianity by looking at Paul.

XIII. Because of this educational approach, people were able to take on Paul's personality to a large extent and really could write what he himself would have written in response to new situations.

XIV. Hence, even though Paul did not literally write some letters, they may still represent his point of view.

XV. Discussion: What are the strengths and weaknesses of the ancient model of education where the goal of education was to become like the teacher? What are the strengths and weaknesses of a modern model when the goal is to help students become "individuals"? Do you prefer the ancient or modern educational approach and why?

Assignment: Read Colossians

Colossians

Key quote: Colossians 2:9-18a: "In him [Christ] the entire fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you are filled with him. He is the head of every ruler and authority. In him you were circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, with the circumcision of Christ, by the stripping off of the carnal body. You were buried with him in baptism, in which you also were raised with him through faith in the action of God who raised him from the dead. When you were dead in the uncircumcision of your carnal self, he [God] made you alive together with him, forgiving us our trespasses, erasing the record against us with its decrees that were harmful to us. He removed it from our midst by nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities, publicly disgracing them triumphing by it. Therefore, let no one judge you over food and drink or in respect to a holiday or new moon or Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things which were to be, but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one condemn you insisting on self-abasement and the worship of angels . . ."

Discussion: Do you believe in angels or other intermediary heavenly beings? If so, what should our attitude be toward them?

I. (review) There is scholarly debate over whether or not Paul wrote Colossians.

II. Partly because of that debate it is unclear whether the letter was sent to Colossae, a town in Asia Minor (modern Turkey).

III. If Paul wrote the letter, then it certainly went to Colossae, but if the letter is pseudonymous, its destination may also be fictitious. Colossae may have been devastated by an earthquake in 60 or 64, and having a letter addressed to a town that scarcely still existed may have been a way of indicating pseudonymity. Unfortunately, the now abandoned site has not been excavated, and we do not know how severe the damage was.

IV. Colossians attacks a "philosophy [2:8]," and from the letter we can deduce something about it.

A. The "philosophy" contained regulations about worship and food (2:16).

B. It taught that we must pay attention to celestial beings (2:8, 18).

Apparently, these dwell between us and God, and we must deal with them to get to him (cf. ancient bureaucracy and astrology).

C. Perhaps it was the end result of some visions (2:18).

V. In reply, the letter stresses that only Christ is important, because through him we have direct and complete access to God.

A. Christ has authority over all.

1. "All things were created through him and for him" (1:16).

2. By his death and resurrection he has brought all things into obedience.

B. In Christ "the fullness of deity dwells bodily" (2:9) and, consequently, is immediately available.

C. Christ has abolished the Jewish ceremonial law (2:20-21).

D. Through him we have already begun to share in heavenly glory (3:1).

VI. Accordingly, the basic theology of Colossians is similar to that of the undisputed epistles, but there are some new emphases.

A. There is a greater stress that Christ is the Lord of the universe.

B. And that Christians have already achieved heavenly glory. Note though that the second coming is still affirmed (3:4).

C. The church now has an impact on the whole cosmos (1:18, 23).

D. God's plan of salvation in Jesus is now the great spiritual mystery, and by understanding it we achieve wisdom (1:25-27, 2:2-3).

E. There is a stronger emphasis that the church must have the same hierarchic structures as existed in the Pagan environment (3:18-4:6).

VII. These emphases help combat the enthusiasm for such things as the "worship of angels" and are at least partly a response to them.

VIII. Yet, these same emphases also reduce the need for an imminent second coming.

A. Christ fills the universe and, hence, is present already.

B. We already participate in his triumph over the powers that enslave humans.

C. The Church is a continuing institution that is changing the universe.

D. The essential Christian "mystery" is not the second coming, but the ongoing plan of salvation.

E. The "respectable" social teachings allow Christians to live comfortably in conventional Greco-Roman culture.

IX. Colossians is a transitional document.

A. Despite the disagreement over authorship (see previous lecture), most scholars agree that Colossians must be later than the undisputed letters (c. 50-60 C.E.) and considerably earlier than Ephesians (late 1st cent.).

1. If Paul wrote Colossians, it must be later than the other letters to account for the very different literary style (e.g., the long sentences).

2. If Paul did not write it, then it must have appeared after his death and yet long before Ephesians which quotes Colossians (esp., Eph. 6:21-22; cf. Col. 4:7-8) and apparently takes it as pauline.

B. Theologically, Colossians also is halfway between the undisputed letters and Ephesians and the Pastorals. As we shall see, these epistles carry such themes as the mystery of salvation and the need to be respectable a step farther.

X. In my opinion, Colossians is especially relevant.

A. Today some Christians have once again become fascinated with heavenly beings and other esoteric knowledge.

B. Colossians reminds us that finally only Christ is important.

(time permitting): Pictures of the unexcavated site of Colossians.

Assignment: Reread Colossians; read Ephesians

Ephesians

Key quotes: Ephesians 1:15-23: "Since I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and love toward all Christians, I have not ceased giving thanks for you, as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation to perceive him, so that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of the glory of his inheritance among Christians, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power for us who believe by the working of the might of his strength, which he exercised in Christ by raising him from the dead and making him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, high above every ruler and authority and power and lordship and every name that can be named, not only in this age but also in the one that is to come. And he [God] has put all things under his feet and granted him to be head over all things for the Church which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all things in every way."

Ephesians 5:21-25: "Be subject to one another out of respect for Christ, wives to their own husbands, as to the Lord, because the husband is the head of the wife as Christ also is head of the Church. He himself is the savior of the body. But as the Church is subject to Christ, so also wives are to be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her."

Discussion: How do you feel about the institutional church and why?

I. The document we call "Ephesians" originally addressed a wide audience.

- A. The letter was probably not sent exclusively to Ephesus.
 - 1. Of course, the title "to the Ephesians" is not original, since letters do not have titles.
 - 2. The words "in Ephesus" in 1:1 are missing in the best manuscripts.
 - 3. The early Christian heretic Marcion (fl. mid. 2nd. c.) called the letter "to the Laodiceans."
- B. The tone of the letter is general. Indeed, the letter does not even assume the reader has much previous knowledge of Paul (3:2-6).
- II. The letter attempts to interpret Paul's historical significance.
 - A. Ephesians is probably pseudonymous and literarily dependent on Colossians (note, e.g., Eph. 6:21-22; cf. Col. 4:7-8).
 - B. Hence, it is likely that Paul was dead when the letter was written.
 - C. The letter gives a general presentation both of his ministry and doctrine.
 - D. Accordingly, the letter attempts to tell a later generation why Paul's theology and missionary work were significant.
- III. Like Colossians, Ephesians emphasizes
 - A. The absolute pre-eminence of Christ over all things (Eph. 1:21-22).
 - B. Christians already share in Christ's heavenly glory (Eph. 1:3, 2:6). Ephesians emphasizes that God dwells in us through love (Eph. 3:17-19).
 - C. The great spiritual mystery is God's plan to save everyone through Christ (Eph. 3:3-6).
- IV. Even more than Colossians Ephesians emphasizes the presence of salvation now and quietly drops hope of a second coming.
- V. What is especially new in Ephesians is the emphasis that Christ primarily saves the universe through the Church. Note that in Ephesians (unlike the undisputed letters) the "Church" is the international organization rather than the local congregation.
 - A. God's eternal plan is to overcome evil and reconcile all things through Christ (1:9-10).
 - B. Christ through his ministry, death, and resurrection founds the Church.
 - C. The Church is his "body" (1:22-23; i.e., the place on earth where he continues to be especially present) and, hence, is the place where we receive the Holy Spirit (2:22).
 - D. Through the Church Christ
 - 1. Delivers human beings from spiritual ignorance by revealing God's plan (3:2-11).
 - 2. Delivers us from sin by teaching us what to do and giving us power to do it (2:1ff., 4:17-24). Note that Ephesians repeats Paul's theology that we are saved by grace through faith (2:8-9).
 - 3. Makes Gentiles heirs to the promises of Israel, and so, the barriers between different groups, especially Jews and Gentiles, disappear (2:11-19).
 - 4. The heavenly powers that are contrary to God learn his wisdom (3:10).
 - 5. God brings love into human relationships and institutions (5:21-

6:9).

E. Accordingly, the Church is Christ's bride (5:31-32) and fills all things (1:22-23).

VI. In Paul's name, the letter urges Christians to live up to their calling as members of the Church.

A. Christians are to keep the Church united and orthodox.

B. Different people within the Church are to use their differing gifts for the benefit of all.

C. We are all called to take our place within the Church's hierarchical structures.

D. Above all, we are to promote love among Christians.

VII. Hence, for Ephesians Paul's primary significance is that he is a foundation of the Church.

A. The Church is built on the "apostles," especially Paul (2:20).

B. As a missionary, he brought the Church to the Gentiles.

C. In his letters he teaches the Church's fundamental doctrines.

D. We show our loyalty to Paul by building up the Church.

VIII. On the whole, contemporary Americans are skeptical of institutions (e.g., the United States Congress) and tend to emphasize their negative features.

IX. Often Americans are especially critical of the institutional Church. Note that many find the conservative social teaching of Ephesians (5:21-6:9) a good illustration of what is wrong with the institution.

X. If we wish to view such figures as Jesus and Paul positively, we sometimes downplay the fact they produced the Church and emphasize their other achievements.

XI. Yet, Ephesians is surely correct when it suggests that Paul's greatest impact on the world came through helping found the Church.

XII. Perhaps then, despite all of the Church's failings, we should take seriously Ephesians' insistence that

A. The Church is the place where different cultures and races come together. Indeed, the Church is the largest and most influential international organization.

B. The Church successfully teaches spiritual knowledge and virtue. Note that our beliefs and behavior patterns are largely the products of community conditioning.

C. The Church is sometimes even the way that God's wisdom is communicated to the powers (e.g., the political powers) of his world.

D. The Church has brought at least a measure of love into various oppressive institutions (e.g., patriarchal marriage).

Assignment: Reread Ephesians; read 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus.

The Debate over Paul's Legacy; the Pastoral Epistles as a Response

Key quotes: 2 Peter 3:15: "Consider the patience of our Lord [in not coming yet] as [an opportunity for] salvation, just as also our beloved brother Paul wrote you,

by the wisdom given to him, as he speaks about these things in all of his letters. In them there are some things which are difficult to understand which the unlearned and unstable distort to their own destruction, as they also do to the rest of the Scriptures."

1 Timothy 6:20: "Timothy, guard the deposit, avoiding the profane chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called 'knowledge,' which by professing some have missed the mark concerning the faith."

I. In the second century the Church divided into two groups

A. An elitist movement called Gnosticism (from Greek for "knowledge").

1. Psychologically, Gnosticism was based on
 - a. A sense that your true self is alien to the world in which you dwell.
 - b. A taste for esoteric speculation about spiritual matters.
2. There are many varieties of Gnosticism but basically Gnosticism taught
 - a. Originally there were only spiritual beings.
 - b. Then through some sin or error
 - 1). An incompetent being created the physical universe.
 - 2). Some particles of spirit got trapped in matter.
 - c. Those of us who feel alienated from the material and social universes have these particles in us and differ radically from other human beings who either do not have a spiritual component or else are totally ignorant of their "higher" dimension.
 - d. To save us, Christ descended from the spiritual realm and took on only the appearance of a body, but not the actual substance of one.
 - e. He revealed to us the secret of our special origin and nature.
 - f. He also revealed how to negotiate the path back to the spiritual realm when the soul leaves the body at death.
 - g. Until death we show our true spiritual nature by living as much as possible as if we had no material bodies. We do this either
 - 1) By asceticism (including complete sexual abstinence) which is what the Gnostics themselves clearly advocated.
 - 2) By self-indulgence (including debauchery) which is what their critics claimed that the Gnostics were engaging in.

B. A broad-based movement which we may call "orthodoxy" (from Greek for "right opinion").

1. Orthodoxy wanted to affirm the Church's heritage, make

Christianity seem reasonable and respectable, and make the Church attractive to ordinary people.

2. Among other things, orthodoxy taught

- a. There is only one God, and he is perfectly virtuous and wise and created the world.
- b. He entered a real body in Jesus.
- c. We gain salvation by believing orthodox doctrine and leading moral lives. Note that the orthodox insisted that marriage is legitimate and sex must be confined to it.

II. Ultimately the orthodox won, partly by emphasizing

- A. Apostolic succession. A legitimate church leader had to be part of an institutionalized succession which the orthodox claimed went back to the first followers of Jesus.
- B. Creeds. The orthodox drew up statements of faith which they required church goers to recite and accept. These creeds proclaimed doctrines (e.g., that the One God created the universe) which Gnostics denied.
- C. Canon (Greek: "rule"). The only sacred books were those which belonged to lists which the orthodox compiled. The New Testament is the ultimate result and, hence, its books basically reflect the orthodox viewpoint.
- D. Orthodox thought and lifestyle were consonant with the best of Paganism (esp., Greek philosophy).
- E. Orthodox positions were faithful to the founders of the Church.

III. Already by the end of the first century Paul began to be revered as one of those founders.

- A. Of course, during his lifetime Paul had been a controversial figure, and conservative Jewish Christians had attacked him as an irresponsible innovator (see Gal.).
- B. By the end of the first century, however, the vast majority of Christians were Gentiles and revered Paul who had championed Gentile Christianity.
- C. Consequently, Paul along with Peter was regarded as one of the pillars of the Church.

IV. Paul's surviving letters became authoritative.

V. Consequently, both the Gnostics and the Orthodox claimed that Paul's letters supported their viewpoints (2 Peter 3:15-16). Because Paul's letters were contingent responses to specific pastoral problems, one could argue that he was either

- A. Pro- or anti- apostolic. Note the ambiguity of Paul's relations with Peter, James, and John.
- B. Pro- or anti- sexual and material. Note 1 Corinthians 5-7.
- C. Pro- or anti- Old Testament. Note Galatians.
- D. Pro- or anti- esoteric wisdom. Note 1 Corinthians 1-4.
- E. Pro- or anti- conventional morality. Note Paul's stress that "all things are lawful but not all things are helpful" (1 Cor. 6:12, 10:23).
- F. Pro- or anti- women's rights. Note the tension between Gal. 3:28 and 1 Cor. 14:34-35.

- VI. 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus form a special group within the pauline epistles.
- A. They are the only letters addressed exclusively to an individual.
 - B. They tell "Timothy" and "Titus" what to do as Paul's representatives.
 - C. The directions are much the same.
 - 1. To appoint and supervise bishop/priests and deacons.
 - 2. To oppose false teaching and support traditional doctrine.
 - 3. To promote ethical living.
 - D. In recent centuries these letters have been called "the Pastorals" (i.e., letters which give advice to pastors).
- VII. From these letters we can reconstruct the situation of the pauline churches at the time.
- A. Paul is now the revered apostle who has a spiritual stature incomparably greater than that of his associates (e.g., 2 Tim. 4:16).
 - B. An institutional leadership exists, consisting of bishop/priests and deacons who ultimately derive their authority from Paul. There is also an order of widows.
 - C. Apparently, there is a body of authoritative teaching (the "deposit") (e.g., 1 Tim. 6:20).
 - D. "False teachers" are (among other things) forbidding marriage and spreading "myths" (e.g., 1 Tim. 1:3-4, 4:1-4).
- VIII. This situation suggests that the letters were written around the end of the first century when "orthodoxy" and Gnosticism were emerging and the conflict between them was starting.
- IX. The Pastorals make the claim that Paul would have opposed Gnosticism (1 Tim. 6:20) and supported such things as apostolic succession, orthodox doctrine, the subordination of women, and conservative morality.
- X. Discussion: Do you agree with this claim?
- XI. My own answer is
- A. Paul probably would have supported these things, especially as a contingent response to a crisis (cf. telling women to be silent).
 - B. However, he would also have insisted that at least theoretically all Christians are free in the Spirit to make up their minds and speak in Christ's name.
 - C. It is striking that Paul himself could not have satisfied the requirements which the Pastorals set for church leaders.

Assignment: Study 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus.

The Pastorals and the Limits of Christian Accommodation

Key quote: 1 Timothy 3:2-7: "The Bishop must be above reproach, married once only, temperate, prudent, hospitable, a good teacher, not a drunkard, nor a bully, but gentle, peaceable, and not greedy. He is to rule over his own household well, having his children submissive and respectful. If someone does not know how to rule over his own household, how will he take care of God's Church? A bishop is not to be a new convert so he will not be conceited and by the devil fall into

condemnation. He must also be well attested by outsiders . . ."

1 Timothy 4:1-4: "The Spirit explicitly says that in the last times some will depart from the Faith and pay attention to deceitful spirits and the teaching of demons through the hypocrisy of liars, whose consciences are branded with a hot iron. They forbid marrying and teach to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by the faithful who know the truth. Because every creation of God is good, and nothing is to be rejected when it is received with thanksgiving."

I. The Pastorals make a striking accommodation to the "Roman establishment" (i.e., the institutions, values, and beliefs of the ruling class).

A. The Pastorals advocate a social structure for the church which mirrors the structure of Roman society.

1. The church is hierarchic, and those at the top give orders and those at the bottom obey.
2. The church leadership (bishop/priests and deacons) comes from the same circles as does the social leadership, namely the male heads of large households (e.g., 1 Tim. 3:4).
3. Of course, the people at the bottom, namely children, women, and slaves, are the same.
4. The church like the larger society contains people who have vastly more wealth than others (1 Tim. 6:17-19). Note that earlier Christianity had sometimes told the rich to give up their wealth (e.g., Acts 4:32-5:11), whereas now there seems to be no such demand.

B. Many of the ethical values in the Pastorals seem typically Roman, such as self-control, self-sufficiency, piety, reverence.

C. The social prejudices also reflect those of larger society. Note the sexism (e.g., 1 Tim. 4:7, 2 Tim. 3:6) and anti-Semitism (Tit. 1:10ff.), to say nothing of the attack on Cretans (Tit. 1:12-13).

II. In part this accommodation seems to be an attempt to avoid persecution (see, e.g., 1 Tim. 6:1, Tit. 2:5) and facilitate evangelism (1 Tim. 2:1-4).

III. However, it is noteworthy that the Pastorals have an openness to the world in general.

A. The letters assume that God is at work in the world apart from the church (note 1 Tim. 4:10, Tit. 1:12).

B. The letters stress that the church has some spiritual responsibility for the world other than simply trying to convert it (1 Tim. 2:1ff., Tit. 3:1-2).

C. They also assume that in principle everything God made is good (1 Tim. 4:3-4).

D. And that the rich can play a positive role (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

IV. The Pastorals also have theological and ethical emphases which an educated Pagan might appreciate.

A. A stress on one God (e.g., 1 Tim. 2:3-5).

B. A Christology in which Jesus is primarily God's manifestation or mediator.

- C. A stress on ethics, and, especially, on conscience. Note that an unethical Christian can be said to be "worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim. 5:8).
 - D. The conviction that the reckless pursuit of wealth can lead to spiritual ruin and that we should be content with what we have (1 Tim. 6:6-10; note the famous quote, "The love of money is the root of all evil.").
 - E. The expectation that the rich will be generous is assisting those in need (1 Tim. 6:17-19).
- V. Accordingly, the Pastorals provide some New Testament justification for openness to the world--an openness which people in the contemporary church often find attractive and necessary.
- VI. They also indicate the theological basis for such openness, including
- A. The awareness that Christians and non-Christians often honor a common God.
 - B. And share ethical concerns.
 - C. All creation is good.
 - D. Christians have a responsibility to help society and the world.
- VII. The Pastorals give us the social basis for such openness.
- A. An attitude that the most pressing problem the church faces is weird religion within (cf. the liberal concern about "fundamentalism").
 - B. A sensitivity toward public opinion, especially respectable public opinion.
 - C. An awareness that the rich are in a position to do far more economic good than the poor are.
- VIII. Still, the Pastorals also provide a warning: All societies are at least partly sinful, and when the church becomes "relevant," it inevitably adopts attitudes that are partly corrupt. It is precisely many of the attitudes that Pastorals adopted from Pagan society--the attitudes toward slaves, women, rulers--that make these letters so troubling today.
- IX. Discussion: Do you like the Pastorals? Given the fact that Paul probably did not write them, should they be in the New Testament?
- Assignment: Read Exodus 1-24.

The Underlying Unity of Paul's Thought

- I. (review) The letters which Paul wrote are in large part contingent responses to particular situations.
- II. (review) After Paul's death there was a struggle over what viewpoints were "pauline." The Pastoral Epistles present one position.
- III. In modern times scholars have debated over whether there is a "key" to Paul's thought, and, if so, what it is. Some influential suggestions:
 - A. Justification by faith (Luther and many subsequent Protestant thinkers). Christ on the cross bore the punishment for our sins, and we receive salvation as a free gift if we have faith in what he has done for us. By believing in this good news we find peace and joy and can begin to do

good deeds out of gratitude. Note: This older interpretation of justification by faith is not entirely what Paul meant (see above).

B. Eschatological participation (E.P. Sanders). Note: "Eschatological" means "having to do with last things." Through the Spirit we are united to Christ and already participate in his coming lordship. The power of this union keeps us from sin.

C. The apocalyptic triumph of God (J.C. Beker). Thanks to the cross and resurrection, Paul looks forward to God's coming transformation of the universe. Hence, Paul suffers in communion with all things and lives in hope.

D. A growing affirmation of the world (C.H. Dodd). As Paul matured, he became more convinced that this world was good, that it would last, and that through Christ all things would reach salvation. Dodd assumes Paul wrote Colossians and Ephesians, and these offer his final reflections. Note: Even if one disagrees over whether Paul wrote these letters, one can say that they are his successors' legitimate extension of his evolving thought.

E. An opposition to the imperial theology of peace through military conquest and the glorification of the Emperor. Paul's theology opposes the oppressive rule of Rome. By saying that Jesus is Lord, Paul is saying that the Roman Emperor is not (some contemporary scholars; e.g., John Crossan).

F. An affirmation of the continuing Jewishness of Paul's theology. Through Jesus God fulfilled the promise to Abraham that the Jews would bring salvation to all nations (N.T. Wright). Note that this salvation includes unifying humanity and ending tyrannical hierarchical structures.

IV. Discussion: Is there an underlying unity to Paul's thought? If so, what do you think it is?

V. In my opinion, we should only think that something is the "key" to Paul's thought if it meets the following criteria:

A. It must be present in all the undisputed epistles except Philemon (which is brief and does not discuss theology).

B. It must plausibly explain how at least Colossians and Ephesians are in continuity with Paul's thought.

C. It must explain how the various contingent positions in the epistles can be applications of itself.

VI. I believe Paul arrived at his fundamental theology by using perspectives from the Hebrew Scriptures/Old Testament to examine the implications of Christ's death, resurrection, and the resulting presence of the Holy Spirit.

VII. (review) Old Testament religion had at least three basic convictions:

A. Ethical monotheism.

B. The special election of a people.

C. That God especially revealed himself and chose his people through a particular historical act--the exodus from Egypt and the giving of the law on Sinai. Together these events were the basis of the covenant between God and Israel.

VIII. In first century Judaism there was an unresolved tension between

universalism and particularism.

- A. Monotheism suggested
 - 1. The equality of all people (cf. Stoicism and Islam).
 - 2. The goodness of all creation.
- B. Yet, election and law taught
 - 1. One ethnic group was special
 - 2. Some things were clean and others were not.

IX. With his conversion Paul concluded that the "Christ event"--and, especially, the crucifixion, resurrection, and the coming (presence) of Christ's Spirit--was the primary act of divine revelation.

X. Consequently, Paul concluded

- A. The one God is primarily the Father of Jesus.
- B. The chosen people are those who acknowledge Jesus as Lord.
- C. God's plan for salvation is made known in the crucifixion, resurrection, and the Spirit of Jesus.
- D. Hence, a new age of final fulfillment is beginning. Note that some passages in the Hebrew Scriptures/Old Testament look forward to such an age.

XI. From the crucifixion Paul concluded

- A. God loves sinners because Christ died for us (e.g., Rom. 5:6ff.).
- B. The old age is foolish and wicked because it "crucified the Lord of Glory" (1 Cor. 2:8).
- C. Consequently, we must suffer to show God's goodness and resist accommodation to this age.

XII. From the resurrection Paul concluded

- A. Christ is more powerful than the rulers of this age, including death, and is now defeating them.
- B. Accordingly, he will soon take complete control of all things.
- C. Then those who have lived as he did will share in his triumph and be transformed into his risen likeness.
- D. Hence, final salvation is still to come, and we must live in hope.

XIII. From the presence of the Spirit, Paul concluded

- A. We have the first fruits of final salvation, and live in the paradox of strength in the midst of weakness.
- B. The gospel is for all nations because people of different nationalities receive the Spirit.

XIV. From the oneness of God Paul concluded

- A. The unity of all people in Christ.
- B. All things are clean.

XV. Paul then applied these basic conclusions to address contingent pastoral situations and produced more specific (and quite diverse) perspectives. Thus, in Galatians he could emphasize the Spirit to show that we have already been set free from this age, whereas in 1 Corinthians he could emphasize the resurrection to show that deliverance is still to come.

XVI. From the One God revealed in Christ's crucifixion, resurrection, and Spirit, we can derive the proposed "keys" to Paul's thought listed above (see III).

- A. Justification by faith is based on the cross and the Spirit as God's undeserved gift.
- B. Eschatological participation especially emphasizes the Spirit and sees the Spirit as pointing to final deliverance.
- C. Apocalyptic triumph emphasizes Jesus's resurrection and sees it pointing to an apocalyptic event for all people.
- D. A growing affirmation of the world emphasizes that the One God created all things.
- E. The opposition to the Lordship of the Roman emperor is based on the crucifixion and the resurrection and the Spirit. The powers of this age crucified Jesus, and he triumphed over them by rising from the dead. His Spirit makes us part of a new creation.
- F. The continuing Jewishness of Jesus is shown by Paul insistence that through the crucifixion, resurrection, and the Spirit, Jesus fulfills the promises of God to the Jews.

XVII. Monotheism and Christ's crucifixion, resurrection, and Spirit are major themes in all the undisputed letters (except Philemon) and in Colossians and Ephesians.

XVIII. We can also see why the Pastorals feel so different. In them, the crucifixion, resurrection, and the Spirit are not prominent.

Assignment: Study for the final examination.

Class Discussion: What is your overall impression of Paul? How has what you learned in this class affected your understanding of life?

(time permitting) A Brief Reflection on the Religion of Jesus and the Religion of Paul

- I. In modern times many people have contrasted the religion "of Jesus" with the religion "about Jesus."
 - A. The religion "of Jesus" is the religion he himself held; it was Jewish and proclaimed God's Kingdom.
 - B. The religion "about Jesus" is the religion that the Christian Church holds; it centers on the claim that Jesus is divine and is the savior of all people.
- II. Critics of Christianity have suggested that the religion "about Jesus" is inconsistent with the religion "of Jesus" and, therefore, dubious.
- III. Paul, of course, was an early representative of the religion "about Jesus."
 - A. He was one of the first people to insist that Gentiles could become followers of Jesus without adopting the Jewish law.
 - B. He also proclaimed that Jesus was Lord, including that Jesus was divine.
 - C. He produced the earliest Christian writings that survive, and these writing have helped define Christianity.
- IV. Some non-Christians have even claimed that Paul--not Jesus--was the founder of Christianity, and that Paul's faith was untrue to Jesus.

V. Consequently, we must examine the question of how Paul's faith relates to that of Jesus and whether the two are compatible.

VI. The religion of Jesus.

A. Jesus was, of course, a Jew and basically took the faith of his people for granted.

B. Accordingly, he believed that God had a special relationship with the Jews and had given them the Mosaic Law.

C. Nevertheless, Jesus held that God was now doing something fundamentally new: Through Jesus and his followers, God was founding the new Israel and inaugurating an epoch of blessedness.

1. God was freeing people from the power of sickness and Satan.

2. He was giving people the power to recognize their deepest sins (especially hypocrisy) and repent. Note that for Jesus true goodness could only come from a transformed heart.

3. He was inviting Jews to be reconciled to each other and to give up hatred for their Pagan enemies. Note that Jesus taught that the central demand of the law was to love.

4. Jesus believed that the movement he was starting was the renewed Israel. Note the appointment of the twelve apostles who apparently symbolized the twelve tribes of the ideal Israel.

D. Jesus also believed that God would soon act in a dramatic and powerful new way to vindicate this message and bring final salvation. Jesus may not have specified the details, and perhaps he did not think he knew them.

However, he apparently did believe that in the end the Gentiles would join the new Israel (Mat. 8:10-12).

E. Armed with the conviction that God would vindicate him, Jesus went to Jerusalem and confronted the authorities with his message and ended up getting crucified.

VII. Paul's religion was the same, except that he held that the first stage of God's vindication of Jesus had already taken place in the resurrection, and so the time to convert the Gentiles had come.

A. Of course, Paul like Jesus held that through Jesus and his followers, God was beginning the new Israel and inaugurating an era of blessedness.

1. He was freeing people from the power of sickness and Satan.

2. He was giving people the power to recognize their deepest sins (especially hypocrisy) and repent. Note that for Paul (as for Jesus) true goodness could only come from a transformed heart. Mere legalism was futile.

3. He was inviting all people to be reconciled to each other. Note that Paul in imitation of Jesus taught that the central demand of the law was to love.

4. Note that Paul believed that the Church was the new Israel (e.g., Gal. 6:16).

B. Like other early Christians, Paul claimed that God had made Jesus Lord of the Universe at the resurrection and would soon complete Jesus's vindication by judging the world through him. Accordingly, the time to

convert the whole world had come.

C. Paul's only fundamental innovation was to decide that the Gentiles who had never been expected to follow the Jewish Law could become followers of Jesus without becoming Jews. This position was controversial in the early Church, and Paul had to defend it.

VIII. Consequently, the question of whether Paul's religion is compatible with that of Jesus boils down to the question of whether God raised Jesus from the dead and made him Lord. Of course, Paul himself insisted that belief in the resurrection was the indispensable foundation for all Christian faith.

Assignment: Study for the final examination.